5-2016

Vocational Implications of Cult Involvement

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation

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May 2016
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Abstract

Currently, the majority of studies published on cult membership have been quantitative and have focused primarily on theories and trends about cult membership. These studies have been insufficient in shedding light on the individual's experience. Qualitative studies are necessary to explore the individual's accounts of their experiences with past cult involvement and the impact these experiences have on employment. Because of the potential vocational impacts of cult involvement, it is valuable to explore the psychosocial aspects of work. A qualitative methodology informed by phenomenology was utilized to investigate the unique experience of individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult. Seven essential themes were found through data analysis: hiding the past, fear, application difficulties, difficulty obtaining employment, inability to maintain employment, talking it out, and symptoms of psychiatric disabilities.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation owes its existence to the help, support and inspiration of several people. Firstly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the participants of this study who were willing to share their very personal and amazing experiences. Thank you.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, mentor, and friend Dr. Tanya Owen, for her excellent guidance, patience, and for providing me with massive amounts of diet coke. I would like to thank Dr. Brent Williams, who patiently corrected my writing and supported my research. Thank you for the advice and willingness that allowed me to pursue research on a topic for which I am truly passionate.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Ramey, you have been an ever present beacon of support, encouragement, and advice as I stumbled my way through this process! The joy and enthusiasm you have for qualitative research was contagious and motivational for me. I would also like to thank Dr. Stefanie Lusk for guiding my research for the past several years and helping me to develop my background in rehabilitation.

To Brandy, I have always been able to turn to you when I have needed a listening ear, a passionate opinion, or someone to run away with for a weekend of shenanigans. You are a great friend and I am so proud to now be able to help you on your path to your PhD. To Rachel, you are one of those rare friends who just fits perfectly in your life from the first moment. You have been there with me through so much over the last ten years and are probably one of my biggest cheerleaders. To Mike & Mike, you two picked me up and helped me carry on during some of the hardest times in my life. Both of you showed me such genuine love and support. I know that I would not be where I am today if you both had not been in my life right at that moment.

To my Mom and Dad, you have encouraged my curiosity and stubbornness from day one, even when these great qualities may have back fired along the way. While there were so many family members who helped in so many ways during the years of this endeavor that I am thankful for, I am especially grateful to my grandfather, Dennis and cousin, Teri. Grandpa you passed on to me the inquisitive drive to dig deep to find the real story and also the ability to sit back and enjoy the finer things in life like the Beatles. Teri, you and Eric both have hearts of gold and have done so much for all of us. You give so much of your heart to everyone in your life in order to make their lives better. Thank you for becoming the glue that brings our entire family together.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband Scott and our children Maleah and Landon. You all were so understanding and supportive during the countless hours I had to spend researching and writing. With a family like ours, anything is possible!

Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Peggy Jones. Her support, encouragement, and constant love have sustained me throughout my life.

"A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials heavy and sudden fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends desert us; when trouble thickens around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts." -Washington Irving

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Chapter One: Introduction

Organization of the Chapter

The chapter begins with an introduction to the topic of vocational implications after cult involvement, which is followed by a discussion of the basis for the study. Following this is the statement of the problem. The sections that follow include background information on psychosocial aspects of work and acquired disabilities from cult involvement. The next section contains the research question and research sub-questions, followed by the significance of the study. The next section concerns the conceptual design of the study. Further, the chapter presents the organization of the dissertation and a summary.

Prevalence and Impact

It is estimated that there are approximately three to five thousand active cults in the United States (Lottick, 2005; Singer & Lalich, 1995). Despite this number, cults have still managed to mostly operate in isolation from society, shrouded in secrecy and denial. In spite of this isolation, the majority of members do manage to escape by the age of 35 (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1992). As with other transitions in life, some people are able to carry on with their lives seemingly unscathed after cult involvement; more often though, ex-members encounter a variety of emotional problems and troubling psychological disabilities (Ryan, 2013).

With the unique issue of acquiring a disability due to traumatic experiences, individuals leaving a cult are in greater need of social supports and professional interventions to help them transition back into society. Previous writers about the cult recovery process have acknowledged the need for vocational rehabilitation or career counseling to facilitate a former cult member's recovery and reintegration into society (Ford, 1993; Martin, 1993; Singer & Lalich, 1995).

Career development and vocational rehabilitation literature has also supported the therapeutic value of work as a source of independence, personal identity, self-esteem and social integration (Brown, 2003; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Rubin & Roessler, 2001; Szymanski & Parker, 1996). Despite this, there remains a gap in the body of research about the experience of individuals leaving a cult and obtaining employment. While the need for vocational rehabilitation has been stated, the unique barriers to employment, appropriate resources, and individual experiences with employment have not been appropriately explored. This study brought to light some of the unique issues for employment with this population.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the experience of this author and conversations with other rehabilitation counselors, rehabilitation counselors are working with clients who were, at one time, involved in a cult. Rehabilitation counselors should be aware of the unique challenges experienced by these clients, in order to provide appropriate assistance to individuals during this transition. However, this is difficult at the present time due to the gap in research pertaining to employment issues within this population. This gap in research leaves rehabilitation counselors and other professionals ill-equipped to fully serve clients in this population.

Although trauma has been studied in general, very little literature exists on the impact of cult involvement and employment. The first step in filling this gap in research is to gain an understanding of the essence of the experience of leaving a cult and transitioning into employment. This step must be completed before rehabilitation counselors can develop appropriate interventions and service plans for this population.

Psychosocial Aspects of Work

Because of the potential vocational impacts of cult involvement, it is valuable to explore the psychosocial aspects of work. In addition to financial benefits, employment has also been linked with other benefits for an individual including: higher self-esteem, greater self-efficacy and identity (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Rubin & Roessler, 2001; Szymanski & Parker, 1996). Individuals who are successful in gaining paid employment have been found to have reduced scores on measures of psychological symptomatology (Bell & Lysaker, 1997; Creed & Mcintyre, 2001; Creed & Reynolds, 2001; Haworth & Paterson, 1995).

The negative psychological impacts of unemployment have also been well established in the literature (Murphy & Athanasou, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009). One of the most widely accepted theories on the effects of unemployment is Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) latent deprivation model. Jahoda proposes that it is the loss of five latent benefits of employment (i.e. time structure, activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status) that accounts for higher levels of psychological distress found in the unemployed. Jahoda also theorized that while other social institutions can fulfill some of the functions, only work can provide them all.

Acquired Disabilities from Cult Involvement

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) defines a disability "as an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment" (Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 2016, p.1). Cult survivors have reported physical and psychological impairments that resulted from the abuse they suffered while in an abusive cult (Ford, 1993; Langone, 1993; Tapper, 2002). Symptoms experienced by ex-cult members vary widely, but include anxiety, depression, substance abuse, guilt, sleep disorders, loss of identity, cognitive deficiencies (e.g.,

memory, perceptions, decision-making, or information-processing deficits) and emotional impairments (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008; Dickerson, 1998; Tapper, 2002). Cults strip their members of their identities, leaving them traumatized and incapacitated physically, emotionally, financially, and vocationally (Ford, 1993; Langone, 1993; Leisure Whitlatch, 2010).

Research Questions

This study examined the following main research question: What is the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult? In order to gain a deeper understanding of the unique essence of the experience the following research sub-questions were also explored:

1. Using Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) theory of latent benefits of employment (time structure, activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status) what are the primary barriers for integration to employment after cult involvement?
2. Are there additional barriers to gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement due to the adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership?
3. How can rehabilitation counselors and other professionals best assist an individual obtaining employment after leaving a cult?
4. What benefits and resources are the most useful for individuals gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement?

Significance of the Study

Current literature regarding cult recovery has paid little attention to the employment experience for individuals transitioning from a cult. While writers about the cult recovery process have acknowledged the need for vocational rehabilitation counseling during a former cult member's recovery period, the necessary research to inform rehabilitation counselors of best

practices has not been done (Ford, 1993; Martin, 1993; Singer & Lalich, 1995). This lack of research suggests that professionals who work with former cult members may be missing the possible value of vocational rehabilitation in the recovery process. As a result, research in this area may have implications for mental health practitioners, rehabilitation counselors from the private and public sectors, family members of cult members and ex-cult members.

Conceptual Design

The conceptual design for this study was based on qualitative methods informed by phenomenology. Phenomenology is an approach of qualitative research that is used as an interpretive research strategy (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanations is the objective of phenomenology (Morrisey & Higgs, 2006). Phenomenology seeks to simply understand how people construct meaning of an experience. Qualitative studies observe how people's social worlds are constructed, without attempting to map a single reality and without interference from the researcher (Groenewald, 2004; Morrisey & Higgs, 2006). The crucial goal of any phenomenological study should be to understand the lived experiences of an individual, from the individual's perspective (Groenewald, 2004; Morrisey & Higgs, 2006).

Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method was used to analyze the data. This method is based on Husserl's descriptive phenomenological philosophy that was designed as an alternative approach for human science research. This method lends itself well to gaining an understanding of a phenomenon because it is considered discovery-oriented rather than verification-oriented. Giorgi (1985, 2009) has delineated five important steps of protocol for data analysis. These steps will be discussed in further detail in the data analysis section of Chapter 3.

The process of how this study can be visualized is provided in Figure 1.1:

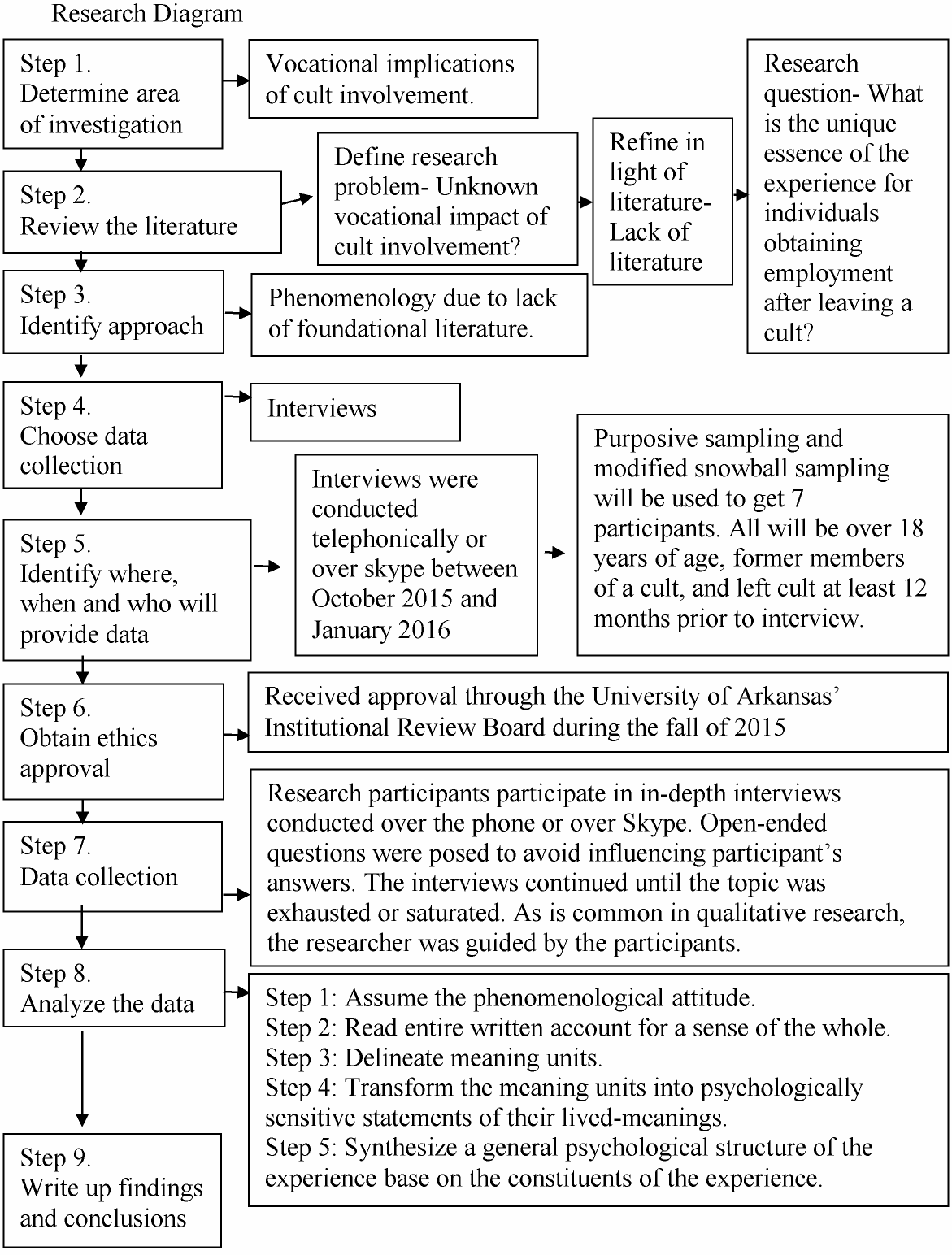

Figure 1.1: Research Diagram

Organization of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to explore possible implications to employment after cult involvement. This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces and motivates the need for exploration into the lived experiences of former cult members. The following chapter is a comprehensive review of interdisciplinary literature that when brought together begins to form a better picture of the physical and psychosocial scars that individuals are burdened with during and after their time in a cult. However, because shades of secrecy still preclude recognition of this issue, many areas of importance are still left to be explored. This study aims to help fill part of this void.

An in-depth explanation of phenomenological methods that were employed to gather rich data is explained in chapter three. This data was gained from asking research questions that had the intent of examining this specific phenomenon from many sides and perspectives until a unified picture of the true essence emerged. Chapter four offers a foundational understanding of the lived experience of former cult member through the analysis of data following the five steps of Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method. Lastly, chapter five provides the results of the study, conclusions, and recommendations. This information will begin to remove the shroud of secrecy so often accompanying discussions on cults and allow for theories and policies to begin to be formulated

Summary

Chapter one begins the conversation about implications of cult involvement. The basis of the study and the statement of the problem guides the research questions. The questions are sufficiently open-ended enough to allow for a guided, but holistic, attempt at gathering the full experiences of the individuals. Background information on psychosocial aspects of work and

acquired disabilities from cult involvement is included in this chapter to begin to explore the complexities involved in obtaining employment for a person with past cult involvement. Chapter two interweaves literature from different backgrounds of knowledge that will provide a stronger foundational understanding of the vocational and psychosocial impacts of an abusive cult.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Organization of the Chapter

In this chapter, a review of the literature related to the research questions is provided. The first section of this chapter introduces Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model (1981, 1982, 1997) as a framework with which to understand the importance of employment on mental health. After being in an environment that may not have demanded, or even allowed, paid employment as an economic necessity, individuals leaving a cult are at an increased risk of psychological distress according to this model. This negative psychological impact may cause barriers for integration to employment after cult involvement, which can be explained through Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model (1981, 1982, 1997).

After defining the major tenets of Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model, an overview of the impacts of cult involvement, including psychological and physical health outcomes, and economic implications, are provided. Major headings in Chapter Two include: Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model, definition of cults, adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership, trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and employment, transition from cult to society, trauma and vocational rehabilitation, and employment benefits. While literature on cult membership and its effects on mental health and vocational planning are very limited, there is a growing significant literature base regarding the impact of trauma on mental health and vocational planning/career development. Therefore, the electronic databases PsycINFO and ERIC were searched using the following keywords: cult, new religious movement, work, employment, vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation counseling, career development, trauma, disability, and posttraumatic stress disorder. These keywords were utilized in an effort to bring about a better understanding of past cult membership and its effect on employment.

Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model

As individuals in a cult often have their basic needs supplied, including cult-provided shelter and food met, they are particularly disadvantaged in meeting their needs without the support of the cult. Using Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) theory of latent benefits of employment, this study will explore the primary barriers for integration into employment following cult involvement. In the early 1930's, Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel found that the loss of employment was accompanied with a decline in an individual's wellbeing. Marie Jahoda later developed the latent deprivation model, which stated that paid work provides both a manifest function (income) and five latent functions, which are time structure, activity, status, collective purpose, and social contact (Jahoda, 1981; Jahoda, 1982; Jahoda, 1997).

While individuals are generally motivated to work in order to fulfill the manifest function of income, they also benefit from the so-called "unintended by-products" of employment of time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and activity (Jahoda, 1981, p.188). Jahoda proposed that it is the loss of these latent functions during unemployment that impacts negatively on psychological well-being. Figure 2.1 below, depicts the interactions of the five latent functions of paid employment on psychological well- being:

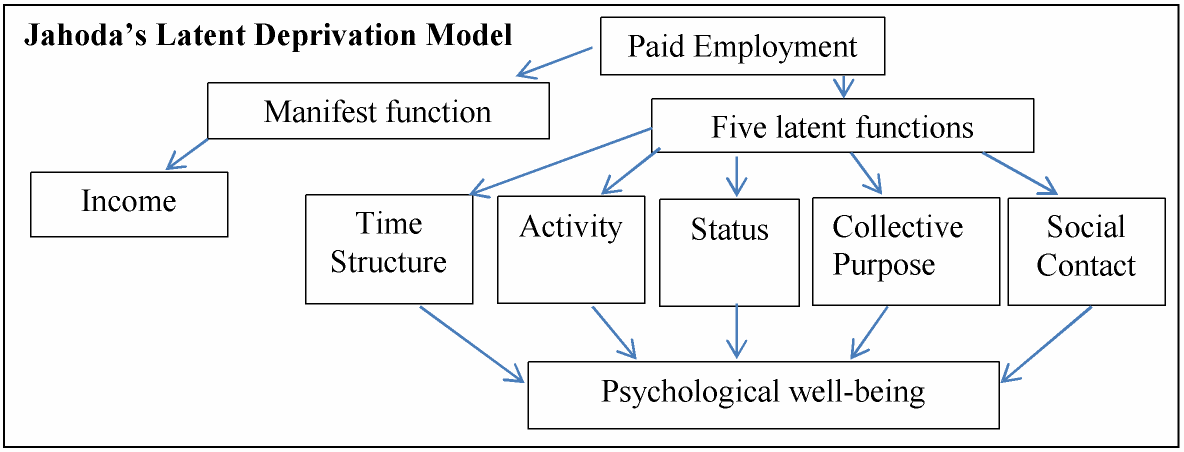

Figure 2.1. Interaction of five latent functions on psychological well-being.

Marie Jahoda argued that people "have deep seated needs for structuring their time use and perspective, for enlarging their social horizon, for participating in collective enterprises where they can feel useful, for knowing they have a recognized place in society, and for being active" (Jahoda, 1984, p. 298). She theorized that employment was the only institution that provided all five latent functions in adequate amounts. Organized religion or volunteering for an organization can provide one or more the functions, "they are less entrenched, less regular, less controlled, and not linked to the economic necessity for making one's living" (Jahoda, 1988, p. 17).

Recent studies have continued to provide empirical support for this model showing that psychological well-being is correlated with access to these latent functions (Creed & Mcintyre, 2001; Creed & Reynolds, 2001; Haworth & Paterson, 1995). In a study of 28 managers, Haworth & Paterson (1995) investigated the effects of Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) five latent functions on mental health. Multiple regression analysis revealed that collective purpose and status both had an influence across a range of measures of mental health, including increased positive mental health and freedom from negative mental health. Creed & McIntyre (2001) found similar results in their exploration of the impact of Jahoda's latent functions in predicting psychological well-being. In this study, a sample of 248 unemployed people, ranging in age from 16-65, completed measures of well-being in regards to Jahoda's latent benefits of employment. While significant associations were found between all of the latent benefits and well-being, status appeared to be the most influential benefit, followed by time structure and collective purpose.

In Creed & Reynolds' (2001) study of 148 youth between the ages of 16 and 36, levels of deprivation of employment benefits were related to levels of psychological distress. Participants were divided into four occupational subgroups (unemployed with no access to paid work,

unemployed with access to some paid work, unemployed with access to regular paid work, and full-time employed). Participants were then assessed for levels of economic and experiential deprivation, social loneliness, and psychological distress. Results indicated that those who were employed full-time had the least amount of deprivation, while participants who were in the group of unemployed with no paid work experienced the most social loneliness. Results also suggested that both economic and experiential deprivation were able to predict psychological distress.

This model proposes that the five latent functions satisfy fundamental and permanent psychological needs. Jahoda contends that unemployment can cause psychological distress because it deprives a person of the valued by-products of employment, which typically function as psychological supports. Therefore, when an individual is unemployed, they experience psychological distress, such as a depressed mood (Jahoda, 1982). According to this model, after being in a very rigid, controlled environment that may not have demanded, or even allowed, paid employment as an economic necessity, individuals leaving a cult are at an increased risk of psychological distress. This negative psychological impact may cause barriers for integration to employment after cult involvement.

Definition of Cults

The term cult is often a challenge to define. There have been attempts to define what separates a harmful cult from other types of groups. In 1985, the American Family Foundation adopted one of the most commonly quoted definitions of a cult used in literature:

> Cult: A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control (e.g. isolation from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it, etc.), designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. (West & Langone, 1986, p. 119-120)

Adverse Psychosocial Consequences of Cult Membership

After examining the effects of psychological distress from the absence of the latent benefits of employment, this study will explore if there are additional barriers to gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement due to the adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership. A clearer picture of the psychological consequences of being involved in a cult is beginning to emerge as more researchers and clinicians study current and former cult members. Many researchers have asserted that cults are psychologically damaging and have negative effects on the individuals who participate (Barker, 2006; Burghoffer, 2002; Lalich & Tobias 2006; Singer 2003; Singer & Lalich, 1995; West & Martin, 1994).

Commonly reported negative psychological symptoms displayed by former members of an abusive cult include depression, guilt, fear, paranoia, slow speech, stiffness in facial expressions and body posture, indifference to physical appearance, passivity and memory impairment (Collins, 1982). These symptoms may be the result of the abuse suffered by cult members. According to psychologist Paul Martin, who treats recovering cult members, a third of post-cult counseling clients also report physical or sexual abuse during cult involvement (Tapper, 2002). However, some argue that the most psychological harm occurs in the process of leaving the cult due to the isolation experienced from society during their time in the cult (Barker, 2006; Burghoffer, 2002).

Trauma

Although literature on cult membership and its effects on mental health and vocational planning is limited, there is a growing substantial literature base on the impact of trauma on mental health and vocational planning/career development. Research highlights the dominant role of trauma in mental health issues and the relationship between trauma experiences and other

chronic physical diseases (Felitti, Anda, & Nordenberg, 1998; Green, McLaughlin, & Kessler, 2010). The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as:

> An emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. (APA, 2014)

A growing number of social service organizations have recognized the impact of trauma on the children, adults, and families they serve and have begun exploring ways to make their services more responsive to people who have experienced trauma (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015).

Violent crime victimization is now one of the leading causes of disability in the world (Hoffman et al., 2014). Estimates propose that up to one quarter of disabilities around the world may be the product of injuries and violence (WHO, 2014). Trauma can occur in a single incident or become a chronic presence. An individual's ability to cope with violence or trauma is moderated by individual and contextual factors, including social support, cognitive functioning, personality variables, behavioral capacities, preexisting psychological conditions, and the duration and intensity of the trauma (Coursol, Lewis & Garrity, 2001; Strauser, Lustig, Cogdak & Uruk, 2006).

Tobias and Lalich (1994) note that there are factors before, during, and after cult involvement that affect recovery and the possible development of emotional difficulties or psychiatric disorders. One relevant factor before involvement is a person's age. Children who are born and raised in cults are expected to have significant difficulty adapting to society outside of the cult (Kendall, 2011). Individuals recruited in high school and college may not get to pass through typical developmental stages and their career, sexual and marital development may be disrupted by cult membership (Tobias & Lalich, 1994). Former members, particularly female

members, may have lost personal, as well as vocational identity during their cult experience as they are often kept from outside paid work (Wolfson, 2002). While an individual is a cult member, the work of the cult is the highest priority and the individual's career and education are de-emphasized (Wolfson, 2002).

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Employment

According to Aronoff, Lynn, and Malinoski (2000), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a common diagnosis for former cult members. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is a mental health disorder that is triggered by a terrifying event. Coping with the effects of cultic violence can be overwhelming due to the victim's lack of control over the situation. This abuse can have a serious impact on an individual's ability to cope in both the short term and long term. The chronic nature of abuse can cause not only immediate physical injury but also lasting mental shifts as a person attempts to process the trauma.

Commonly reported symptoms associated with PTSD include: flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety and uncontrollable thoughts about the trauma (Dillon, Hussain, Loxton, & Rahman, 2013; Levendosky, Bogat, & Martinez-Torteya, 2013). The severity of the violence, duration of exposure, age of onset and perceived degree of threat all exacerbate symptoms (Hughes & Jones, 2000). Evidence suggests that younger, unemployed women with a higher number of children and low levels of social support are at higher risk of experiencing PTSD symptoms (Hughes & Jones, 2000). Other factors such as having traditional sex role orientation, poor health, and witnessing the destruction of personal property also increase PTSD symptoms (Hughes & Jones, 2000). Having a traditional sex role orientation and poor health are common for individuals in a cult due to isolation (Aronoff, Lynn, & Malinoski, 2000; Hughes & Jones, 2000; Wolfson, 2002)

While previously considered an anxiety disorder, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) made multiple changes to the diagnosis of PTSD. Disorders, like PTSD, that are precipitated by specific stressful and potentially traumatic events are now included in a new diagnostic category, "Trauma and Stress-Related Disorders," (APA, 2013). The criteria for PTSD includes specifying qualifying experiences of traumatic events, four sets of symptom clusters, and two subtypes. The four sets of symptom clusters are: re-experiencing the event, heightened arousal, avoidance, and negative thoughts and mood or feelings (Hughes & Jones, 2000).

Treatment for PTSD includes a variety of approaches such as psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioral therapies (Thomas, 1995). Watts (1997) noted the importance of preventative interventions of PTSD, such as becoming familiar with reactions and risk factors. This will allow for earlier detection and a greater change of successful treatment (Watts, 1997). Keim, Malesky, & Strauser (2003) found a negative correlation between PTSD symptoms, life satisfaction, and work personality in a population of women with disabilities. Since this research also indicated that PTSD interferes with work related factors, the authors suggest that counselors evaluate women for PTSD, provide counseling and teach coping skills before referring to job readiness programs. The authors propose that these steps will likely help individuals improve life satisfaction and performance at work (Keim et al., 2003).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may hinder an individual's ability to develop or retain desired career thoughts and behaviors (Strauser et al., 2006). According to Herman (1997), prolonged repeated trauma occurs when the victim is unable to leave a situation and is under the control of the perpetrator. Herman states these conditions exist in concentration and slave labor camps, some religious cults and in other organized situations involving sexual exploitation.

Transition from Cult to Society

Due to the adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership, it was important for this study to inquire as to how rehabilitation counselors and other professionals can best assist an individual in obtaining employment after leaving a cult. This involves examining the benefits and resources that are most useful in gaining or maintaining employment. Several authors have discussed recovery from trauma for cult survivors (Burghoffer, 2002; Cassidy, 2000; Ford, 1993; Giambalvo, 1993; Singer & Lalich, 1995). Treatment for cult survivors can include deprogramming, exit counseling, residential treatment programs, outpatient counseling, self-help groups, and support groups (Burghoffer, 2002).

During recovery, former cult members process cult experiences, gain an understanding and acceptance of themselves, and learn to meet their basic needs in a healthy manner (Burghoffer, 2002). Once an individual becomes educated about cults and rejects the teachings of the cult, he or she must return to their former life (Cassidy, 2000). Martin (1993) observed that individuals typically go through three stages of recovery after leaving the cult: (1) developing a conceptual framework; (2) grieving, reconciliation and reaching out; and (3) reintegration into society. The third stage, reintegration into society explores practical issues including career, personal, spiritual, and relational issues that are needed to live a satisfactory life. This stage is the most appropriate time for an ex-member to begin working with a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

In the first stage of developing a conceptual framework, the focus of recovery is on education and self-acceptance. This necessitates thoroughly analyzing the cultic milieu, recognizing the importance of relationships, and exploring the specific nature of the cultic trauma. Valuable insights can often be gained at this stage; however, defensive and guarded

answers about the group may also still occur. Defensiveness and denial must be addressed with education about the effects of cultic abuse. This can be done in a manner comparable to the early intervention work used with victims of rape and other types of interpersonal trauma.

Stage two, grieving, reconciliation and reaching out, focuses on regaining purpose. While the first stage has a focus on events that occurred in the past, the second stage of recovery should change the focus to the present. Treatment issues at the second stage include identifying why the individual was lured into a cult, regaining their ability to validate their pre-cult self, and discovering how this former self was suppressed and displaced by the pseudo-identity developed while in a cult.

Stage three, reintegration into society, is the most future oriented and optimistic of all the stages. At this phase of treatment, ex- members begin to explore educational and vocational options. Career and guidance counseling is one of the biggest needs during this stage. A vocational rehabilitation counselor would be of greatest use at this stage to assist with evaluation of strengths of the individual, identifying skill deficits, providing personal and vocational counseling, and arranging vocational training and job placement to remediate educational and vocational deficits that have occurred while the person was in the cult.

Trauma and Vocational Rehabilitation

One aspect of an individual's psychological functioning ability that may be affected by trauma from cult experiences is a person's ability to engage in vocational activities. In a 2006 study of trauma survivors, Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, & Uruk, found a significant relationship between high levels of trauma symptoms and high levels of dysfunctional career thoughts along with lower levels of work personality, and vocational identity. Strauser et al. (2006) also discovered a correlation between trauma symptoms and career thoughts. As trauma symptoms

increased, so did the level of dysfunctional career thoughts (Strauser et al., 2006). As a result, the trauma survivor's career goals, personality, interests, and talents became unclear and unstable. The authors propose that this finding supports the idea that trauma symptoms impede cognitive functions related to the development of a clear vocational identity and may hinder the implementation of career goals (Strauser et al., 2006).

Strauser et al. (2006) also found that trauma survivors demonstrated higher levels of dysfunctional work personality behaviors than non-trauma survivors. Work personality behaviors that were disrupted included appropriate interaction with co-workers and the public, on-task behavior, and timeliness. Individuals with higher levels of trauma symptoms may be at an elevated risk for using inappropriate or ineffective behaviors in the work environment and may also have difficulty maintaining regular attendance on the job (Strauser et al., 2006).

Lysaker, Nees, Lancaster, and Davis (2004) conducted a study comparing work behaviors between abused and non-abused groups of individuals with schizophrenia spectrum disorders. They found that those individuals with a history of childhood sexual abuse worked fewer hours and demonstrated poorer work performance. Their results are linked to findings that traumatic experiences in general may be related to trouble processing information when under stress (Lysaker et al., 2004). Another study by Singer (2003), noted that former cult members may experience barriers when they reenter society including completing job applications, difficulty with concentration, and/or inefficiency. This author recommends that former cult members gradually begin making friends, having a social life, and working or returning to school or both.

Employment Benefits

According to a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Data, 45.1 million adults (19.9 %) in the United States had a mental illness in

2010. Thomas (1995) reported that the literature recognizes the benefits and emphasizes the importance of providing the vocational services to individuals with mental illness. As individuals with disabilities are not a homogenous group, neither are people with mental health disabilities. While one individual with a diagnosis of PTSD may be unable to maintain competitive employment, another individual with the same diagnosis may be able to maintain employment (Watzke, Glavao, Gawlik, Huehne, & Brieger, 2006). Predictors of employment include both the person's interest and motivation about employment, and the quality, continuity, and intensity of treatment services provided (Waghorn et al, 2012).

For individuals with psychiatric disabilities, successful employment depends upon the type of work they perform, the attitudes of those in their work environment, and the individual's compliance with treatment (Falvo, 2009). In addition to the monetary rewards of employment, work can increase self-esteem. This can be an especially strong therapeutic tool for those with psychiatric disabilities as it provides a means of structuring and occupying time, opportunities for social interaction and a sense of personal achievement (Tschopp, Bishop, & Mulvihill, 2001; Waghorn et al., 2012). Many individuals with psychiatric disabilities cite employment as critical in their recovery process (Waghorn et al., 2012). Bond et al. (2001) found that individuals with psychiatric disabilities who worked in competitive employment showed a reduction in psychiatric symptoms, an increase in self-esteem, and satisfaction in leisure and finances.

Summary

The present literature review supplied in Chapter two establishes a theoretical relationship between Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model (1981, 1982, 1997), cults, career development, work and vocational rehabilitation services as well as the need for research in this area. The purpose of this literature review is to bring together background information for the

present study by providing a theoretical basis using Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model (1981, 1982, 1997), to address barriers to gaining and maintaining employment after cult involvement, exploring how rehabilitation counselors can best assist an individual obtain employment, and examining the benefits and resources that are most useful in gaining or maintaining employment.

While research has established a relationship between trauma and vocational barriers, it is still not clear how exiting a cult impacts a cult survivor's career development. The first step in filling this gap in research is to gain an understanding of the essence of the experience of leaving a cult and transitioning into employment. This step must be completed before best case practices and policies can be formulated for working with an individual seeking employment after cult involvement. To fill this need a phenomenological study should be undertaken to help understand several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. Chapter 3 will explain the methods of conducting a phenomenological study using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method for data analysis. Giorgi's (2009) method is considered discovery-oriented rather than verification-oriented, which lends itself to gaining an understanding of a unique phenomenon.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Organization of the chapter

Chapter three will provide the methods that were used for conducting this qualitative phenomenological study. The first section of this chapter will again provide the guiding research questions of the study. The next section will cover the specific steps that were followed for recruitment and establishing consent. Following this, the methods of data collection will be provided. The next section will explain the five steps of Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method that were used to analyze the data. Methods of ensuring trustworthiness are then explained in detail, as this is of great importance in qualitative research to ensure reliability (Patton, 2001; Seale, 1999).

This study reflects the phenomenological belief that studying individual experiences of former cult members will reveal knowledge about the essence of the experience, which cannot be uncovered in another way (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The basic philosophical assumption underlying this study was best explained when Husserl stated "we can only know what we experience" (Husserl, 1962). Currently, the majority of psychological and sociological studies have been quantitative and have studied theories and trends about cult membership. These studies have been insufficient in shedding light on the individual's experience.

A qualitative methodology informed by phenomenology was utilized to investigate the main research question: What is the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult? Sub-questions that were explored include:

1. Using Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) theory of latent benefits of employment (time structure, activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status) what are the primary barriers for integration to employment after cult involvement?

2. Are there additional barriers to gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement due to the adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership?

3. How can rehabilitation counselors and other professionals best assist an individual obtaining employment after leaving a cult?

4. What benefits and resources are the most useful for individuals gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement?

Recruitment and Consent

Seven participants were interviewed for this study. Studying a small sample number in depth is typical of qualitative sampling in general, and phenomenology in particular (Groenewald, 2004; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). While there are no rigid rules, research texts suggest that a range of five to eight participants is appropriate for a study aiming to explore subjective experience (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Therefore, seven participants were considered suitable for this study.

Purposive sampling was utilized to recruit participants. The main goal of purposive sampling is to select participants on the basis of their personal knowledge about the phenomenon under study in order to capture particular characteristics that are under study (Babbie, 2004; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Four participants were located through online research of writers of cult experiences, on anonymous message boards, and through a personal contact. Utilizing such methods allowed this researcher to find former cult members.

A modified snowball sampling strategy was employed during the second stage of recruitment with the goal of recruiting a more diverse sample. Snowball sampling is typically used with populations that are rare or unknown (Spreen, 1992). Members of these rare populations are sometimes difficult to locate or contact because they often have not all been

previously identified (Spreen, 1992). The basic notion of snowballing is expanding a sample by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Former cult members have shown reluctance to participate in studies, possibly due to a fear of ridicule from those who lack understanding and for the need of closure (Gasde & Block, 1998). This technique allowed more participants to be reached by possibly relieving some of the fear since they were contacted by other individuals with similar experiences. By using this method three further participants will be recruited.

As it is important for members of a purposive sample to share characteristics, a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria were utilized (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). These include: Participants being over the age of 18, being former members of a cult group, and leaving the cult more than twelve months prior to the beginning of this study. It has been reported that it may take individuals leaving a cult anywhere from six to twenty-four months in order to gain a functioning level that is consistent with their histories and talents (Singer, 2003). Ensuring that participants have been out of a cult for at least twelve months allows time for the participants to experience some of the barriers they may face with obtaining employment after their involvement.

Ethical conduct was ensured first by receiving approval to conduct this study from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Arkansas. Participants were allowed every opportunity to have sufficient time to fully consider their participation with family members or partners before participation in this study. Participants were able and encouraged to seek clarification on any aspect of this study that is needed. An information statement that clearly outlines the risks and benefits of participation in this study was provided to all participants. In

addition, interview recordings and transcripts utilized the use of pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondent's identity.

Data Collection

Research participants were asked to participate in three interviews conducted by telephone or over Skype, with the objective of drawing out the personal experience and meaning of each participant's story. Interviews ranged from between 30 minutes and two hours. Following the interviews, each participant was given the opportunity to ask any questions that they had about this project. Open-ended questions were posed to avoid influencing participants' answers and to allow for data to emerge (Groenewald, 2004). Interviews were allowed to continue until the topic was exhausted or saturated. This was achieved by the researcher guiding the participants, but still allowing them to establish the flow of the interview. One participant did drop out after two interviews and before the last one could be completed. Therefore data from that participant was not included.

Qualitative Analysis

Data analysis was based on Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method. This method pulls from Husserl's descriptive phenomenological philosophy as an alternative approach for human science research. Over the years Giorgi (1985, 2009) has delineated five important steps of protocol for data analysis. These steps allow a researcher to grasp the whole meaning of an individual's experience, instead of dividing a story into abstract parts. If researchers divide a given experience into parts before having a thorough understanding of how the person who lived that experience articulates their story, then the end result will be a collection of abstract concepts that do not capture the essence of the unique experience.

Giorgi's (2009) five-step method provides a methodical rigor of "science" without becoming reductionistic in its treatment of research participants. The steps are: (1) assume the phenomenological attitude, (2) read entire written account for a sense of the whole, (3) delineate meaning units, (4) transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of their lived-meanings, and (5) synthesize a general psychological structure of the experience base on the constituents of the experience. These steps are depicted in Figure 3.1 below:

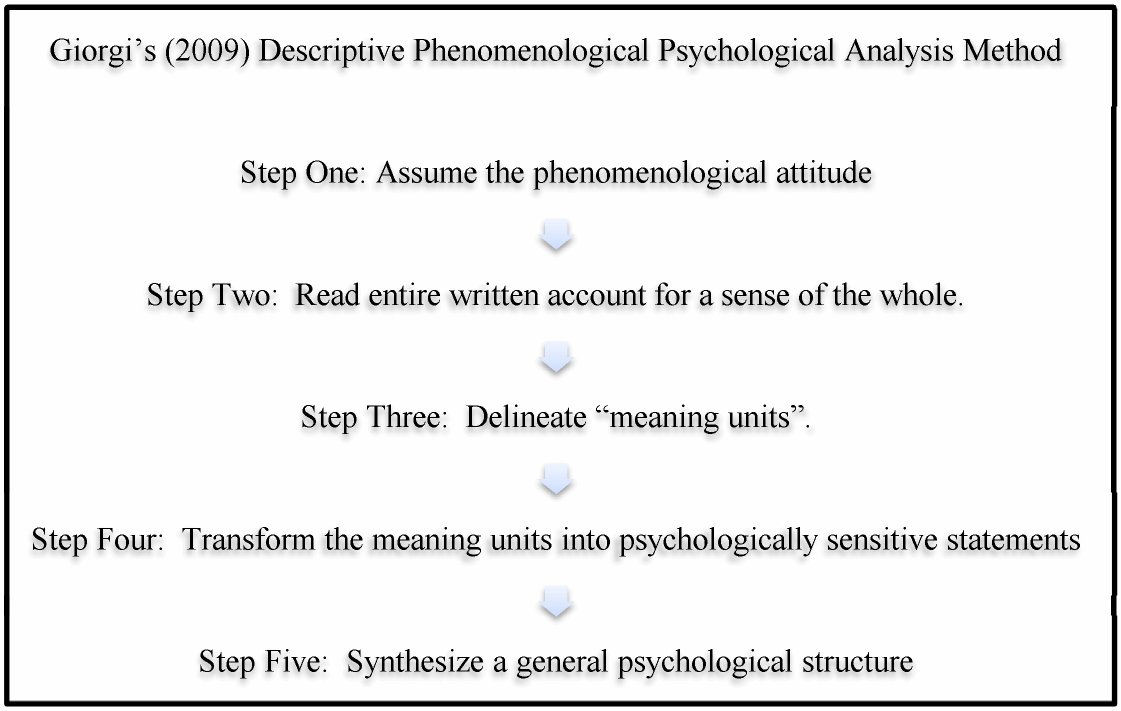

Figure 3.1: Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Analysis Method

These steps are further explained:

Step one: Assume the phenomenological attitude. In the phenomenological psychological method, the first step requires the researcher to adopt a phenomenological attitude. To do this, the researcher "brackets" his or her perspectives to take a fresh look at the data. "Bracketing" requires researchers to be aware of their person prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon. Husserl's method of "bracketing" was developed around 1906 as a way for a researcher to be present to the data without theorizing about its

validity or existence. By simply being present the researcher is able to "see" the data in its authentic form without being biased with personal beliefs. This allows the researcher to remain true to underlying phenomenological idea of bringing experiences "back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 2001).

Step two: Read entire written account for a sense of the whole. The second step in this method is reading the entire "naïve description" to gain a rich sense of the whole experience (Giorgi, 1985, 2009). The "naïve description" from the participant is their experience described in their own words, attitudes, and perspectives without a critical reflection of the researcher on the experience. The researcher must read without presuppositions in order to extract a critical reflection about the participant's experience in order to describe how it was phenomenally experienced (Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 2001).

Step three: Delineate "meaning units". For the third step, Giorgi (2009) suggests that the description of the experience be split into several parts to define the meaning of the experience. These parts should be expressed by numbering the lines or making slashes in the texts (Giorgi, 1985; Wertz, 1985). With this step the relevant parts to the phenomenon can then be identified. Once a part is separated, it is referred to as a "meaning unit"; as it expresses the individual's own subjective meaning of the experience (Ratner, 2001). A "meaning unit" may consist of a word, a sentence or even several sentences (Giorgi, 1985). Formulating "meaning units" within the narrative allows the data to be dealt with in manageable portions (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Step four: Transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of their lived-meanings. At this step in the analysis, the researcher began to look for emotions that are expressed by the individual's description (Giorgi, 1985). The "meaning units" of each

description were fused to develop a descriptive statement of the specific characteristics of each individual in order to let the "structure express the essential network of relationships among the parts so that the total psychological meaning can stand out" (Giorgi, 1989, p73). Then the participant's first-person expressions were changed into a psychologically scientific third-person language. By the end of this step, relevant elements were grouped together according to their interlacing meanings with the goal of expressing the lived experience.

Step five: Synthesize a general psychological structure of the experience base on the constituents of the experience. In the fifth step, the researcher looked at statements that can be taken as true in most cases. Similarities and differences were then established within each specific structure (Wertz, 1985). Identified themes from each participant were then grouped into a number of general themes that appeared common to all participant's stories (Pietersen, 2002). These themes were then linked to previously identified "meaning units". By following these five steps a rich description of the unique lived experience began to emerge (Van Manen, 1990).

The qualitative data in this study was managed and analyzed using the computer- based qualitative analysis package NVivo 11, that was specifically designed for qualitative research (QSR International, 2016). NVivo was useful for its ability to organize the transcripts, build hierarchical trees and model main concepts. This software has been recommended by other researchers utilizing a phenomenological framework (Morrisey & Higgs, 2006)

Methods of Ensuring Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is crucial to ensure reliability (Patton, 2001; Seale, 1999) It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure methods of ensuring trustworthiness are followed when conducting a qualitative inquiry to guarantee transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability in the results. In this study, the following techniques were

utilized to help ensure trustworthiness: Prolonged Engagement, Persistent Engagement, Triangulation, Member Checks, Peer Debriefing, and Audit Trail. These techniques are further explained below:

Prolonged Engagement

In qualitative research, prolonged engagement refers to the investment of sufficient time with respondents to ensure data saturation has occurred. While there is no clear standard on what is sufficient time, a researcher must be immersed in the gathering of data long enough to compensate for the effects of unusual events, limit researcher biases, and counter distortions from the researcher's impact on the environment (Lundy, 2008). Regardless of the skill of the researcher, if insufficient time is spent on a study, it is likely to be weak (Willis, 2007).

Persistent Engagement

With persistent observation, the researcher gains sufficient depth of the data. So while "prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304), the research must explore details of the phenomena under study to a level deep enough that he or she can choose what is important and what is not, thereby focusing on the most relevant aspects. Without persistent engagement, the results of a study will be less credible to a reader (Willis, 2007).

Triangulation

Triangulation in qualitative research is the use of multiple sources of verification to lead to a more accurate conclusion. Qualitative researchers use this technique to guarantee that their data is rich, comprehensive, and well-developed. There are multiple forms of triangulation. Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: methods triangulation (multiple methods), triangulation of sources (multiples sources), analyst triangulation (multiple analysts), and

theory/perspective triangulation (multiple theories). Triangulation is best used in qualitative studies that are focused on generalizations like laws or truths. This process provides a way to cross-reference interpretations and reduces the chance of inaccurate interpretations and conclusions.

Some view triangulation as a method for verifying findings and as a test for validity. This is a controversial assumption, with some postulating that a weakness in one method will be compensated for by another method, which is unlikely (Willis, 2007). A poorly done study using multiple methods will be far less convincing than a well-done study using only one method.

Member Checks

With member checks, the researcher asks participants to review both the data collected and the interpretation of their interview data. This technique allows participants to respond to the findings that emerged as a result of their participation. Participant feedback about the accuracy of data interpretation is viewed as critically important because it allows participants the opportunity to correct errors or question what they perceive as incorrect interpretations (Bellini, & Rumrill, 2009). It also may elicit more rich data regarding specific examples to further clarify particular themes that emerged (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is the process of "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). It involves bringing in an unbiased peer who can question the research methods, emerging conclusions, and biases of the researcher (Willis, 2007). This is a good way to ensure the integrity of the researcher. It is important to utilize someone who is independent of the study to

be able to help diminish researcher biases, which may inadvertently affect the study. Peer debriefers are useful at all stages of the study as a way for researchers to check their insights and interpretations (Bellini, & Rumrill, 2009).

Audit Trail

An audit trail in qualitative research is the documentation of the researcher's work, including all steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings. This should include information about sampling, role clarification of different research team members, the emergence and expansion of ideas, and as the role of different data sources (Willis, 2007). The documentation should show a clear rationale for all decisions made in the study. The audit trail has been dubbed the "single most important trustworthiness technique" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283).

Summary

This chapter discusses the systematic research process that was used to provide adequate data to answer the research questions of the study. The focus was to understand the unique phenomenon of obtaining employment after cult involvement. Chapter three is an in-depth explanation of the phenomenological methods that were employed to gather rich data. This study hoped to shed light on the individual's experience of obtaining employment after cult involvement. This study examined the following main research question: What is the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult? This question was explored deeper by the use of four sub questions that attempt to view the phenomenon from all aspects. In order to develop the whole story of an individual's experience, Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis method were used. This analysis method allows a researcher to grasp the whole meaning of an individual's experience,

instead of dividing a story into abstract parts that do not capture the essence of the unique experience.

Chapter Four: Findings

Organization of the Chapter

Chapter four presents the key findings obtained from interviews with six participants. The first section of this chapter will briefly review the purpose and research design of this study. The next section will cover characteristics of participants and a description of the cultic groups of the participants. Following this, the participants' narratives are given. Lastly, the major findings of the data analysis are provided and discussed.

Participants were asked 20 standard interview questions (see Appendix B) and follow up questions based on responses given. The organization of the data into "meaning units" and themes was undertaken, which captured the general ideas and consistencies the participants expressed throughout the interviews. The purpose of this phenomenological research method was to explicate a deeper understanding of the lived experience of individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult. The crucial goal of this study is to gain an understanding of this experience from the individual's perspective. This information can be used to help fill the gap in literature about this phenomenon and further guide helping professionals to develop appropriate interventions and service plans for this population.

Participants

Purposive and snowball sampling was used for this study. The participants were selected based on their experience with the phenomenon. While there are no set rules on the exact number of needed participants, research texts suggest that a range of five to eight participants is appropriate for a study aiming to explore subjective experience (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Therefore, the use of seven participants was considered suitable for this study. Purposive

sampling was utilized to recruit participants. This type of sampling allows the researcher to select participants on the basis of their personal knowledge about the phenomenon under study in order to capture particular characteristics that are under study (Babbie, 2004; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). A total of four participants were located through this type of sampling.

The researcher filled out an online contact form and emailed listed contact email with research information and contact information to Wellspring Retreat and Resource center. No response was received. Emails with study information and contact information were sent to three moderators for online support groups for cult survivors. No response was received. Emails with study information and contact information were then sent to two writers on cults. One writer did not respond, the other replied that they were not able to assist in the study. Four Facebook messages were sent to online blog writers who write about their personal experiences in cults. Three of four responded. Emails with study information and contact information were sent to these three individuals. Two agreed to participate in the study.

Messages were then sent on Reddit to eleven users that anonymously posted on Reddit about personal experiences in cults. Reddit is an online message board wherein users submit links. The stream of content is curated by the community by voting the importance of posts. From these messages, one responded that they would like to participate in the study. One additional participant was located after a conversation with the researcher's grandfather over Thanksgiving dinner. While discussing the dissertation topic, the researcher's grandfather, who had been a news reporter for a number of years, mentioned that he had previously interviewed individuals who were involved with a cult. He sent an email with the researcher's contact information to two individuals. One of these individuals emailed that they would be willing to participate in the study.

A modified snowball sampling strategy was used to find three additional participants. Snowball sampling is a way of expanding a sample by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Three participants were given the researcher's contact information by two different study participants. All three of these individuals emailed that they would like to be involved in the study. However, during the data collection phase one of these individuals dropped from the study. Data from that individual is not included in the data analysis. The following figures further describe participant demographics.

Table 4.1
Participants' Gender

Gender	Number of Participants
Female	5
Male	1
Total	6

Table 4.2
Participants' Ages

Age	Number of Participants
18 years-25 years old	1
26 years-35 years old	2
36 years-45 years old	2
46 years-55 years old	0
56 years-65 years old	1
Total	6

Table 4.3
Personal Education

Education Level	Number of Participants
No High School diploma or GED	2
High School diploma or GED	1
Some College	2
College Degree	1
Total	6

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative, fluid and reflexive process of inspecting, organizing, and transforming collected data into a form of understanding of the studied phenomenon (Learning Qualitative Data Analysis, 2010). Content analysis was conducted using Giorgi's (2009) five-step method and NVivo 11® computer software for qualitative data analysis. The researcher first listened to interview recordings two times and transcripts were then read three times to achieve adequate understanding. The researcher completed a personal diary during the data collection phase to ensure any presumptions or biases did not influence or alter data collection or interpretation. In addition, the researcher continually reviewed her thoughts and biases with a colleague who was also involved in phenomenological research.

The first step of the phenomenological psychological method is for the researcher to assume the phenomenological attitude. In this phenomenological attitude, the researcher "bracketed" her everyday knowledge to take a fresh look at the data. In other words, the researcher put aside her theoretical, cultural, and other types of presuppositions. The second step in the data analysis required that the researcher read the entire "naïve description" to acquire a sense of the whole experience (Giorgi, 2009, 1985). The "naïve description" provided by the participants was taken in the natural attitude and without a critical reflection on the experience. The third step in the data analysis is the demarcation of "meaning units" within the narrative so that the data can be dealt with in manageable portions (Giorgi, 2009, 1985). The researcher went through the narrative text with the purpose of determining where places of meaning shift within it. After reading the text through and getting a sense of the whole, the subsequent reading was done with the idea of marking where meaning-shifts occurred, which are like the "landmarks" or changes in the flow in some way (Giorgi, 1985). The fourth step taken was transforming the

meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expressions of each of them. The meaning units were re-expressed in the third-person while remaining faithful to the meanings expressed by the participant. In the fifth step, the researcher looked at statements that can be taken as true in most cases. Then similarities and differences were established within each specific structure (Wertz, 1985).

At this point, NVivo 11, a software program for qualitative data analysis, was utilized to assist with content organization, coding and theme identification. This program offered the investigator another method to organize, analyze, and ultimately, develop the final themes. With the assistance of the software program, the researcher then identified five final themes that provided a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Initially, the researcher developed eighty-two nodes as a starting point for "uncovering thematic aspects in lifeworld descriptions" (van Manen, 1990). References within each node were reread within the context of the interview to ensure they were in the correct node. The eighty-two nodes were synthesized to isolate seven essential themes. This process involved grouping nodes together according to conceptual similarities and providing each cluster with a descriptive label. Some emerging themes were dropped because they had a weak evidential base. The final seven themes appeared to be the most encompassing themes that could not be removed from the individual's stories without changing to entire experience. These seven essential themes were found to be: hiding the past, fear, application difficulties, difficulty obtaining employment, inability to maintain employment, talking it out, and symptoms of psychiatric disabilities. These themes will be further explained in a later section in which the participant's narratives are shared.

Participants Cult Groups

As discussed in Chapter two, the definition used for the purpose of this study of a cult is:

> A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control (e.g. isolation from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it, etc.), designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. (West & Langone, 1986, p. 119-120)

In order to be included in this study the cultic group that each participant came from must fit the following criteria based on the above definition: 1. A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing. 2. A group employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control. 3. The manipulative techniques are designed to advance the goals of the groups to the actual or possible detriment of member their families, or the community.

The six participants came from four different cultic groups in the United States that fit the above criteria. All of the cults were religious based, had an abusive leader, had a rigid hierarchy, socially isolated their members, were accused of abuse by their members, and were investigated and raided by the FBI for illegal activities (i.e.- sexual abuse of children, illegal weapons charges). Leaders of all four cults were arrested by the FBI and have either served time or are still serving time for illegal actions while a leader of the cult. The cults ranged in size from 100 to 10,000 members. All four cults had a patriarchal doctrine, the belief that wives are required to be subordinate to their husbands.

Three of the four cults practiced polygamy and “placement marriages” where a young woman of marriageable age is assigned a husband after a revelation from God is given to the leader of the church. In two of these polygamous cults marriageable age was below 18 years of

age. Most of the underage marriages occurred with females ages 13-15. Two cults were considered "apocalyptic" cults, meaning they believed and prepared for the world to come to an end very soon. While there were some differences between the four cult groups, all of the cults put the needs of their leader and the group above the individual. All participants were exposed to either psychological or physical abuse from their cult leaders. The following narratives will describe in detail the individual experiences of each member following their time in a cult.

Participant Narratives

Qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher the opportunity to engage with incredible individuals as she investigated the phenomenon surrounding how they experienced obtaining employment after cult involvement. The following descriptions are designed to help the reader begin to feel the essence of their stories. Pseudonyms are used in order to protect privacy. Table 4.4 is provided on the following page to provide basic information about each participant. Following Table 4.4 narratives for each participant is given.

Table 4.4

Participants' descriptions

Participant	**Current Age**	**Age When Left the Cult**	**Current Education Level**	**Number of Years in Cult**	**Born into, Joined age**
Jennifer	31	16	GED, some college	16	Born into
Sam	45	30	GED	29	< 1 year old when family joined
Michelle	37	26	Bachelor's degree	26	Born into
Allison	30	18	No GED or diploma	18	Born into
Paul	63	33	High School, some college	8	Joined at age 25
Amy	22	20	No GED or diploma	4	Joined at age 16

Jennifer

Jennifer's family exited the cultic group when she was 16. Jennifer's parents had joined the group before getting married, so Jennifer's only childhood experiences had only been with the cult. When her family left when she was a teenager, it was the first time she was allowed to

begin to interact with “the outside world.” Jennifer relays a feeling of fear of the unknown that that followed. She reports “all of our lives, everything had always been decided for us, we had never been allowed to choose anything, where to live, what to wear or what to eat." Jennifer’s parents “knew the group was falling apart. They had been in contact with my dad's sister, so the nine of us moved in to her two-bedroom house when we left." When the family first left the group, her father “enrolled us into a home-schooling program, but after two months of being cooped up in that small house, we begged to go to real school. I almost wished I would have just stayed with home school."

When Jennifer first went to school she was teased “like crazy about how I was dressed and how I acted. I got nicknamed Robogirl because I didn’t know what to say when people talked to me." When Jennifer first started public school, they made her talk to the school counselor, “but I didn’t really want to talk to her so I just went for a few times and just sat there in silence. I wasn’t ready for help at the time." When Jennifer was asked if she felt her education was sufficient while in the cult, she reported “I had a very minimal education. I did learn basic things like reading and basic math. We had to read the King James Bible in order to memorize chapters upon chapters of scripture so we could recite them on command. I was forbidden from reading outside books, watching movies, listening to music or talking to anyone outside of the group. Everything, including education was evil. When I started public school at 16, I was only reading at a seventh grade level. I only stayed in school for a few months before I ran away from home and dropped out."

Jennifer turned “very angry” toward her parents, “They hadn’t taught me anything about how to live a normal life. I didn’t know how to get a driver’s license, get a bank account, write checks, or fill out applications, or even how to behave in normal social settings.” When she ran

away, Jennifer “moved in with some other girls who came from our former group. They were working as strippers because like me, they had no real skills for working or making money. The one thing we had unfortunately learned was how to use our sexuality." The girls Jennifer moved in with helped her at first. She then started making money working at the club. Jennifer didn’t have a car or a driver’s license. She remembers “it took me six times before I finally passed the written part. I just didn’t have a clue about driving or the laws because I had never been allowed to. At first I thought I was really living life. I was making it on my own, I could decide what I did with my day. But soon I gave in to the drugs that so many of the dancers used. I liked being able to just be numb, to not have so many memories from our time at… After about five years and a few suicide attempts, I reached back out to my mom."

Jennifer went home and tried to “make a go of it again." She tried to get “normal jobs like fast food or as a waitress." Through this process, Jennifer felt “humiliated with the whole application process. The only past job experience I could put down was dancing. I couldn’t even mark that I had a high school diploma. It sucked. Every time I felt like as soon as I handed in my application it went straight to the trash. When I did get an interview I found myself lying about my past. I didn’t want anyone to know where I was from or how screwed up I really was. I did get some jobs, honestly it was when I was interviewed by men and I flirted. Once again I found that I could use my sexuality to get what I needed. But even when I got a job it wouldn’t last." Jennifer would generally hold a job for about three or four weeks before quitting. She felt she “never fit in with anyone. If I had to guess, I probably went through 40 jobs or so during the five years after going back to my parents."

Jennifer feels that things changed for her when she met another girl at work who seemed to have as much trouble as her fitting in. Jennifer and her coworker “became friends, and for the

first time I finally found someone that I could talk to about my past. She didn't judge me, she had her own skeletons in her closet. I also gave in to going to counseling, my mom had begged me to for years. After that I started going to the doctor and got on some antidepressants and anxiety meds." The journey of healing took her about a year before she "started to feel normal for the first time in my life." Jennifer's parents wanted her to go to college. It took a lot, but she was "finally able to get my GED and then go on to community college. I didn't ever finish college, but I can at least now put down that I attended college on job applications. I still struggle even now, things go great for about six months and then I just seem to fall apart. Little things like trying to go out and have a drink like a normal adult can turn bad when they ask about where I am from. But I am getting by, and can say that I haven't touched drugs in many years."

When asked what advice she would give others in her situation, Jennifer replied "try and realize that there are people out there to help. And not everything is as evil as we were taught. I think if I would have talked to that counselor back in high school things may have turned out better. So yeah, just to talk to someone. That makes all the difference."

Sam

Sam remembers the experience of trying to "join normal life" at the age of 30 as very difficult. At times she felt "like an alien from another planet." Her parents joined the cult in the early 70s when Sam was an infant. Sam grew up only being allowed to play with others in the group. She believes that "being that sheltered makes it hard even today to trust outside people."

Sam left the cult 15 years ago at the age of 30. She decided to leave when it was decided her 14-year-old daughter was to be married. She herself had been married at 15 and had her first child by the age of 16. Sam did not want her children to "repeat that cycle." Sam stopped "what they call school, when she got married." In her cult, when a woman got married they were then

expected to “work in the kitchen, or with the kids, or doing the tons of chores all the women had to do.” At that point “school is definitely no longer a priority. It’s more important that you focus on pleasing your husband.” It was not until a few years after she left the cult that she was able to go to classes and obtain her GED.

When Sam decided to leave the cult she contacted one of her husband’s other wives that left the group five years previously. This former member helped arrange everything to get Sam and her children out. Sam then went to live with a woman who does outreach to members from that group. This woman was also a former member and “allowed women and their children to live with her while they were getting on their feet.” She also ran a support group for former members. At first Sam was very hesitant to go to the support group because the idea of “joining some other group just scared the hell out of me." But the woman she was staying with kept talking to her about how important it was “to just talk about what I had been through with other people, who had been through the same stuff.”

After eventually going, Sam started realizing that listening to others really helped her. It took a few months before she herself “trusted the group enough to start talking, and then it was like I couldn’t stop the flood gates. I just rambled on and on. I didn’t realize just how much anger I had been holding in.” This support group also lead to Sam getting a job. Another woman who came to the group was married to a man who owned a business. She offered Sam the chance to work as a secretary for the business when a position opened up.

Sam remembers “being scared to death my first day. I didn’t know what to expect at all. I didn’t have any computer experience and I actually didn’t do that great greeting people at first when they came in. Thinking back, I have no idea why they didn’t fire me. I really owe them everything.” Interacting with her coworkers was “very difficult” for Sam. She did not “really

socialize with any of the other ladies, you know like after work and stuff. Not that I had time for it with the kids, but it did start hurting knowing that you aren't even invited."

Sam has now been with the company for 12 years working as an administrative assistant. When asked what she feels has been the key to her success she feels it is all "because of the support group and then who hired me. They gave me way more chances than others would have because they knew why I was so weird." The first few years were the most difficult for Sam. She felt "like I was dropped into some foreign planet. Things like watching TV were so foreign to me."

Michelle

Michelle left the cult she was born into at the age of 26. Luckily, she had a bachelor's degree and had been teaching for a few years in the group. Without that degree, she states, she does not know if she would have gotten a job when she got out. Michelle applied at "about 15 schools before I was finally hired at a small Christian school. And I think I only got that last interview because a friend had made a call to the school on my behalf." Even with a degree, Michelle experienced barriers to employment. She feels this was "because of the area that I lived in most people could tell by my appearance, dress and hairstyle, that I was part of the group. More than once I was asked if my husband knew what I was doing. I guess they were checking to see if I was still involved." Michelle also remembers having difficulty with technology. Besides the limited amount of technology she was exposed to in college, she "didn't watch TV or work on a computer. And college in the early 90s didn't use half of what was used even around 2005 when I got out."

Michelle also felt "really uncomfortable around large groups of new people. So even sitting in meetings at school gave me a lot of anxiety. I constantly felt that people were staring at

me or thought I was stupid. And there was a lot I didn't know. I didn't know what to put for taxes on a paycheck. My husband had always done the paperwork for taxes. And I had to sign my check over to him when I got it. So I didn't know anything about that stuff."

When she first left the cult, Michelle stayed with the daughter of a man who helped other families coming out of that cult. She then moved in with her mother, who had left the same cult about six months prior to Michelle. Michelle's brother also previously left the same cult, but "that was because he was kicked out when he was 13. They didn't like to keep young men in the … because they become competition for the other men trying to gain wives. So my brother was pulled from school and sent to work on a construction crew when he was 13."

Michelle depended on her brother and mother to help her with her six children and with things like transportation. When she got out she did not have a driver's license. She had not "been allowed to drive before." It took Michelle about six months before she learned to drive and obtained her license. She then shared a vehicle with her mom for a year. Besides her immediate family, she believes that the best resources for her were others who had been in the same cult previously. She feels like "they knew what it was like to do everything. The job I ended up with actually came about because another former member called the principal at the school and I guess kind of begged for the job for me."

Michelle did not know about available resources to her. Plus, at the time she was "worried to ask for too much help because I was afraid that the authorities would take my children away from me. A lot of children had been taken from the compound shortly after I left. I guess I was worried that if someone found out we were part of it then they would take my children as well. So really I just tried to hide from any kind of agency."

Michelle does feel that her education has been sufficient for having a career. However, she states “it was normal for most kids to get a seventh grade education. I was one of the last year of girls that got to go to college. After the new leader took over, he didn’t allow it anymore. I was one of the few that graduated high school and got to go on." But even the experience of going to college was shaped by the influence of her husband. Michelle did not get to go to college for her desired occupation, because her “husband got to decide what I could go for. So he agreed to education." Michelle had “to really play into how getting a college degree and then continuing to teach in our community was good for the group, not me. It couldn’t be about me. It had to be about how it would help the group."

Michelle remembers applying at approximately 15 different schools, but only getting three interviews. These interviews went “horribly. I was so used to answering questions in a way that I knew the leaders wanted to hear, that I didn’t know how to answer questions that required imagination or anything like that. I also panicked a few times because I didn’t know what they wanted me to answer." Michelle remembers in one interview, “the lady just looked at me like I was an alien or something when I told her I didn’t have a driver’s license or a car. But before my last interview I had that. I think that helped."

When Michelle was asked about her previous work, she would not elaborate, but would “tell them the name of the school. But in that area everyone knew it was part of the group. It was obvious.” Michelle experienced difficulty when filling out employment paperwork when she did finally get a job. Before this experience Michelle felt she “just didn’t have the knowledge! I hadn’t filled out any kind of official paperwork before. That was always handled by the men. They handled everything with money, bills, and all that. So I actually had to ask the HR lady’s

help. It was humiliating. She actually made some snarky comment about how I guess this must be your first grown up job."

Michelle has had only two jobs since she left the cult in 2005, but they have been at the same school. Even though she had a degree and teaching experience, Michelle was first hired as a teacher's assistant. She worked in that position for about a year before they promoted her to an actual teaching position. She has remained in the same position now for seven years.

Michelle remembers her interactions with her coworkers at first were "just awful, I didn't fit in. It didn't take long for word to spread about me being from the group. It seemed like some people took pity on me and started talking to me and treating me like I was a child. To others I was to be avoided. Like I was some kind of freak or had some horrible disease." For the first few years Michelle stayed to herself. She "didn't really care about fitting in. It was just something I had to do in order to support myself and my kids." At times, Michelle did have difficulty going to work. "Physically, no. Mentally, yeah it was tough. There were times that I almost missed being part of the group. At least there I fit in. Out here I was an outsider. Plus, I was constantly having to deal with the anxiety of my husband, well now ex-husband showing up. I had been encouraged to get an order of protection against him when I first escaped. That way he couldn't take the kids from me. In that community, the police would actually side with the husbands and return the kids back to them. Then it would take years of court battles for the mom to try to get custody back." Michelle explained, "you see from an early age I was told that I couldn't do anything by myself. That I had to depend on my husband for everything. And that my job was to please him, and then he would show his favor to me and my children. You were not allowed to make decisions about your own life or the lives of your children. So to now be all on my own to make all the decisions, and to not be so successful at the beginning it was very stressful."

When Michelle was asked how others could help someone coming out of a cult, she replied "Oh wow, well… I think anyone going through that experience needs at least one person they can trust. Just to be able to talk about things. I was lucky that I had my mom who had been through the same situation I had. Without her, I don't know how I would have made it through. So maybe just being that person someone can talk to, can ask the silly questions about the traditions and routine things for everyone else that we have no clue about. Like how to fill out tax papers."

Allison

Allison was taught to be "fearful of the outside world, but I also felt I didn't belong there either". When she was 18 she decided to leave the cult where she had been born and raised. She went to live with other former cult members. But ended up meeting a man who "treated me pretty bad. All I could think was I jumped from abuse in the cult to even more abuse with an outsider. Maybe some of the things they taught us about all the evil in the world could be true". Following this, Allison "fell into a bad depression and began drinking heavily." She got by financially with the help the other former cult members she lived with. She would also "get jobs here and there. But I became a bit of a drifter. A few of us would decide that life would be better in this other town and we would just move." Unfortunately, Allison felt that "somehow we always ended up in the same type of place. More than once I traded sex for money or favors. That was something the cult taught us, to be flirty to bring in others." Allison continued in this "drifter lifestyle for two years before a suicide attempt landed" her in a psychiatric hospital. In the hospital she "broke down, I couldn't hold in everything I had been through and all the hatred I had for my parents for doing that to me and my brothers and sisters."

When she finally opened up to a social worker at the hospital, they talked her into going to a “special rehab for people who had been in cults. I found out there that a lot of other kids just like me from that cult had committed suicide, like around 35.” Finding this out, made Allison suddenly not “feel weak anymore. If so many others in the same situation felt that was there only option to then it wasn’t just me. It was what we were put through." While Allison began the process of forgiving herself “for being what I felt was a failure, I couldn’t forgive my parents for a long time. They chose to join the… Their choice hurt us all so much." Besides the actual physical abuse Allison endured, she felt the mental abuse was “too much. We grew up living by faith, which meant that every day was filled with stress and uncertainty over food, or how to pay the bills. We lived from miracle to miracle. I started having panic attacks before my teens, and these have never gone away. I have lost countless nights of sleep worried about money or if some unexpected emergency was going to happen."

Allison feels that while she “chose to be free at 18” still today she is having to live “through the brainwashing I went through. I think it is worse for those like me who didn’t have normal life before the cult. The cult was always normal; it was the outside world that was hard to live in. In the outside world I realized how wrong my childhood was." Allison feels that while she only stayed “at that rehab for a few weeks” it had a huge impact on her life. However, “things still aren’t great, I feel so alone and crazy sometimes. Not counting the rehab, I have been in inpatient psych care about six times”. She feels this is one of the major issues with her keeping a job. Allison states that “getting one has been hard enough, but just about the time I start to feel like I am getting along with my coworkers something would happen in my life. The panic would come back, then I would try and cope which never worked."

Allison estimates that she has probably had 40-50 jobs in the last 12 years since she left the cult. She has been able to hold her current job "for almost eight months, so maybe things are finally getting better." Allison reports that she has still not been able to get her GED, she knows she should, but just "haven't been able to follow through with things. I will start but then panic sets in and I freeze." When asked if she has any advice for other coming from a cult, she replied "I don't know if I have any great advice. Well, the rehab place, that was really good. Going somewhere where they actually know about what you have been through. It makes you feel less like a weirdo."

Paul

Paul describes the experience of leaving a cult as similar to going through "a really bad divorce." There is a "feeling of betrayal" after having put so much into a group that becomes like family. Paul states that "it all gets down to trust." After leaving a group like a cult, it is very difficult to trust belonging to another group. Even decades later, other members of Paul's group have never "aligned with another group." Paul and his family have even had difficulty with fitting into another church. "In the group, you belong to something bigger," but with other mainstream churches there is "no connection" that can compare. This feeling of belonging and connection through communal living may be what led Paul to join what was at the time a small church. This group began as a "utopian community that intended to share God's love." In time the leader of Paul's group received a "revelation that the End times was about to begin." Following this revelation, cult members burned family photographs, sold their wedding rings, pooled their earnings, destroyed televisions and any other "reminders of the outside world's propaganda." The combination of this isolation along with the unquestioned authority of a

charismatic leader allowed the group to change from the once "utopian" group to a dangerous cult that left lasting damages to its members.

Besides issues of trust, Paul also reports difficulty when leaving the cult with "trying to figure out how to live normal lives. Who you are and how you perceive the world is paramount in accepting help." When leaving a cultic group often survivors are forced to "question their entire believe system" and feelings like "you are letting God down, or you just aren't worthy or good enough" can make it difficult to be able to talk to a therapist. Paul also reports fear of being judged by someone who doesn't have the experience of what it is like to be a member of a cult. He met with therapists but did not feel it was very beneficial to him. What helped Paul "to escape the mental bondage of the movement was to speak out." He joined a public speaking club and "for the first time was able to speak publicly about my experiences to a group of people who not only did not judge me for my past, but who befriended me." He also began writing a book "as a venue for those buried emotions to surface."

Getting back to "normal" took a while for Paul. Because of his involvement in activities of the group, Paul had to serve time in prison after he left the group. Despite this Paul was determined to get out, get a job and provide for his family. However, "it had been ten years since I had been in normal society, and a lot had changed- in me and in society. I found out quickly that convicted felons don't get hired. On every job application that asked about a felony conviction I told the truth about my past. I had long decided there would be no more skeletons in my closet." The process of getting a job was "horrible, even today, 30 years later." When changing jobs, Paul still feels he has to "look over my shoulder in constant worry" that his past will be discovered. With background checks and credit reports the process becomes "humiliating and dehumanizing."

Another issue on job applications was the past employment section. To try and put something in that section, Paul would put down office clerk, a position that he had held while in prison. While no one questioned where he worked as a clerk, Paul realized that he did not "have a trade." He said this was one big problem with being in a cult, you work for the group but come out without being trained enough to have a profession. Paul was never hired for a job where they knew up front about his past. He did find out that the "easiest profession to get into, that asks no questions, was commission-only sales. I learned the skills necessary and had a natural inclination toward sales, so I provided for my family." In 30 years, Paul "probably had 100-125 jobs, plus five businesses I started that failed, and tried about a dozen Multi-Level companies that I was unsuccessful in."

Opening up to coworkers also proved very difficult for Paul. "Guilt was a major part of my psyche now. I became more withdrawn because of the guilt, unable to look people in the eyes, for fear they would see the pain, the shame, and the past secrets I kept inside." It was difficult for Paul to feel like a team member with coworkers. He describes himself as "withdrawn and guarded" until his coworkers would open up to him, allowing him to then open up to them.

Paul feels that the biggest support came from "the support from my wife and children, my parents, grandparents, my wife's family and the support and encouragement from so many federal agents that had been involved in the case." Paul's best advice for others leaving a cult is to "talk about it, talk, cry, scream. Find someone who will just listen. If they are willing to listen, just talk. Keeping feelings bottled up only leads to more problems." Paul reports that it took "almost nine years to sort out my past propaganda and doctrinal beliefs. I struggled, studied, worked, cried and anguished through it all before I was able finally to reconcile everything in my mind."

Amy

Amy left the cult at the age of 20, after joining when she was 16. She was first introduced to individuals from the group at a party. She remembers they made it "all sound so wonderful." But once she ran away from home and joined the group she realized that it was far from the "perfect family" that she thought it was. She spent most evenings "spreading some Jesus to anybody that would walk by."

When Amy found out she was pregnant and was unable to stop using drugs, she knew she could not stay. Her parents "got me out. They had been trying to get in touch with me for the whole four years that I was in. I snuck into town and used a pay phone to call them. We set it up for me to meet them the next night because they had to drive so far to pick me up. I was shocked that they didn't ever act mad at me. When I left I was five months pregnant. They told me that they would help take care of everything and to not worry. And they have."

Amy and her daughter live with her parents now. She feels they are "probably the biggest support I have. I know that when things get too bad I can go home. But I know they will only be able to bail me out so many times. They have paid for me to go to rehab a few times. And I do my best right after that, but it doesn't ever stick. I keep ending up back where I started, without a job, back on drugs, you know just trying to escape life."

Amy remembers how "they kept talking about how perfect life was there. I totally believed them. I dropped out of school and went with them. I gave up everything. I stopped talking to my parents or any of my old friends." She did not receive any further education in the cult. She still has not acquired her GED or high school diploma. Her parents have pushed her to return to school, but Amy feels that she "just can't."

With tears in her eyes, Amy relayed "I know I am messing up, I know I am putting my parents through hell over and over. I really don't understand why they still stick with me. But I also know that I, and my daughter would be dead if they weren't there." Amy's best advice to others in her situation is "to not give up, for some reason we have made it through an awful experience and we are still here. Maybe there is something that we are meant to do."

Themes

With the assistance of the software program, the researcher identified seven final themes that provided a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. These themes came about through a process of coding the written text into nodes. Eighty-two nodes were originally selected. These nodes were then assigned to a corresponding theme that attempted to capture the essence of the nodes and reflect the communicated experiences of the participants. To name each theme, the researcher attempted to adequately capture and describe the essence of the communicated experience. These essential themes were found to be: hiding the past, fear, application difficulties, difficulty obtaining employment, inability to maintain employment, talking it out, and symptoms of psychiatric disabilities.

Theme One: Hiding the Past

All participants described an effort to hide their past involvement with a cult. Participants expressed feelings of worry, humiliation, shame, and constant worry about others finding out about their past. In an attempt to cover past involvement participants avoided eye contact, left out information on job applications, lied, or tried to avoid discussing their past. The effort to hide the past can be seen while participants were applying for a job as well as when trying to maintain

a job. One participant described the feeling of having to "look over my shoulder in constant worry" that his past will be discovered even 30 years later.

Theme Two: Fear

The entire group of participants discussed the feelings of fear at some point in their experience with obtaining employment after cult involvement. For some, this fear was because all decisions had previously been made for them, "where to live, what to wear or what to eat". Once out of the cult these everyday decisions had to be made by individuals who felt incapable of making rational decisions. Others felt fear of reaching out to "authorities" or professionals in order to receive assistance. Many spoke of the fear of "being judged by someone who doesn't have the experience of what it is like to be a member of a cult." Participants also felt the fear of being judged from family, friends and coworkers.

Theme Three: Application Difficulties

The physical process of filling out job applications and other documents was a challenge for many participants. During their time in a cult, many participants had not been taught how to get a driver's license, open a bank account, or complete job applications or tax papers. Some participants felt "humiliated with the whole application process." This humiliation was only made worse when some participants were taunted about not knowing how to fill out important documents. Another issue on job applications was the past employment section. Some participants would have left blanks in these sections, but most would put down partial truths about positions or lie about their gaps in employment.

Theme Four: Difficulty Obtaining Employment

Participants experienced barriers with obtaining employment. Many relayed that they lacked "a trade" or any real set of job skills. Most participants reported trying to obtain jobs that were entry-level and did not require much education. Some participants reported applying at 15 or more businesses before they found employment. Barriers were experienced at the application phase as well as the interview stage. Some felt that their applications were thrown away before they were reviewed. Others described anxiety with not knowing how to answer interviewer's questions during interviews.

Theme Five: Inability to Maintain Employment

Another barrier to employment experienced by participants is the ability to maintain employment. Participants experienced difficulty interacting with coworkers and supervisors. Social situations, such as meetings, were a source of anxiety for some. The majority of participants were able to maintain a job for only a few weeks or months before quitting or being fired. Half of the participants reported 40 or more jobs since they left the cult.

Theme Six: Talking It Out

When asked what the best advice was for others in the same situation, most responded that having someone to talk to is important to "escape the mental bondage." Most preferred to talk to individuals whom they felt would not "judge" them. Whether that be former cult members or others whom they trusted. Many expressed difficulties with being able to open up to others, but also seemed to feel that opening up was important in getting back into "normal" life.

Theme Seven: Symptoms of Psychiatric Disabilities

Participants described an array of symptoms that could be classified as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Anxiety was one of the most common reported feelings. This feeling was reported at all stages in participant's lives from when they were in the cult, when they were leaving, looking for employment and even while trying to maintain employment. Substance abuse and feelings of depression was also discussed by a few participants, as well as the issue of suicide. However, despite these symptoms only two individuals had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disability. Most individuals did not wish to seek professional treatment that would have allowed for a diagnoses.

Summary

This chapter presented the key findings obtained from interviews with six participants. The first section of this chapter briefly reviewed the purpose and research design of this study. The next section covered characteristics of participants. Finally, the seven essential themes were discussed. Correlation to the literature and correlation to the theoretical context are discussed in chapter five.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter weaves together the literature pertaining to cult involvement with the findings from this particular study. In this section, each of the seven themes are integrated with the literature presented in chapter two. The next sections discuss the results of the research questions, practitioner based implications, and makes suggestions for future research. Limitations of the study are then explained at the end of the chapter before discussing recommendations for further research.

Connection to the Literature

Previously, in Chapter Two, a foundation of literature was presented for positioning the study within a framework of existing publications involving Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Model (Jahoda, 1981, 1982, 1997), cults, career development, work and vocational rehabilitation services. Relative literature is utilized to develop meaning of the themes that emerged in this study. While previous research has not directly explored the potential vocational impacts of cult involvement, highlighting parallels in the findings and bridging the differences in samples and settings is necessary to suggest implications for future researchers.

Theme One: Hiding the Past

The first theme represented in the study, Hiding the Past, reflects the way all participants made an effort to hide their past involvement with a cult. Feelings of humiliation, shame, and constant worry about others finding out about their past were discussed. These findings parallel the research based assertion that cult survivors often hide from others their status as a cult

survivor and their experiences of physical and sexual abuse (Boeri, 2002). In this study, Michelle stated she felt "really uncomfortable around large groups of new people. So even sitting in meetings at school gave me a lot of anxiety. I constantly felt that people were staring at me or thought I was stupid." Jennifer also reported that when she obtained a job interview "I found myself lying about my past. I didn't want anyone to know where I was from or how screwed up I really was."

Matthews and Salazar (2014) reported that cult survivors continue to deal with guilt, anger, shame, and depression even years after leaving a cult. Following departure from a group like a cult, it is very difficult to trust belonging to another group. Even decades later, other members of Paul's group have never "aligned with another group."

Theme Two: Fear

The second theme evolving from the study's data, Fear, captured the essence of how all participants felt feelings of fear at some point in their experience with obtaining employment after cult involvement. Jennifer reported feeling of fears due to having to begin to make important life decisions. Sam believes that "being that sheltered makes it hard even today to trust outside people." Participants expressed feelings of fear and outwardly displayed this fear through actions like avoiding eye contact with the researcher. These findings were similar to those found by Collins (1982), which included: depression, guilt, fear, paranoia, slow speech, stiffness in facial expressions and body posture, indifference to physical appearance, passivity and memory impairment

Michelle reported she was "worried to ask for too much help because I was afraid that the authorities would take my children away from me." Previous cult researchers have described

other fear tactics used by cult leaders that may lead to these later feelings such as using "fear of those outside the group; fear of failure, ridicule, and violence in the group; or fear of spiritual failure or the disintegration of your belief system" to keep members in the cult (Lalich and Tobias 2006, p. 141). This fear may translate into an individual, like Michelle, being distrustful and afraid to use available help from agencies. Paul felt that "Guilt was a major part of my psyche now. I became more withdrawn because of the guilt, unable to look people in the eyes, for fear they would see the pain, the shame, and the past secrets I kept inside."

Theme Three: Application Difficulties

The third theme emanating from the data, Application Difficulties, centered on the barriers that participants faced when filling out job applications and other documents in their job search. Jennifer reported not knowing "how to get a driver's license, get a bank account, write checks, or fill out applications, or even how to behave in normal social settings." She also felt "humiliated with the whole application process. The only past job experience I could put down was dancing." This corresponds with Singer's (2003) study, where it was found that former cult members may experience barriers when they reenter society including completing job applications, difficulty with concentration, and/or inefficiency.

Boeri (2002) also found the lack a work history becomes entangled into the shame and stigma attached to the label of an ex-cultist. The women interviewed in Boeri's study also reported inventing stories to account for years of not working, such as having been a missionary or teaching English as a foreign language in other countries. Michelle experienced difficulty when filling out employment paperwork when she was finally offered employment. Michelle stated she "just didn't have the knowledge! I hadn't filled out any kind of official paperwork

before. That was always handled by the men. They handled everything with money, bills, and all that. So I actually had to ask the HR lady's help. It was humiliating." Jennifer also expressed feelings of humiliation with the application process. Jennifer felt "humiliated with the whole application process. The only past job experience I could put down was dancing. I couldn't even mark that I had a high school diploma. It sucked. Every time I felt like as soon as I handed in my application it went straight to the trash. When I did get an interview I found myself lying about my past. I didn't want anyone to know where I was from or how screwed up I really was."

Theme Four: Difficulty Obtaining Employment

The fourth theme, Difficulty Obtaining Employment, parallels Matthews and Salazar's (2013) findings that cult survivors experience psychological challenges after leaving a cult and reintegrating into society. Part of this difficultly is due to entering society without having the skills to be successful in work or in relationships (Rosen, 2006). Part of the difficulty with finding employment may also be due to the loss of identity felt by some past cult members. A sense of identity is "formed through a socialization process in which the shared meanings of a culture are internalized" (Boeri 2002, p. 337). Individuals leaving a cult lack the socialization within the culture that most people in today's society take for granted.

Consistent with Lalich and Tobias' (2006) research, participants in this study reported feeling anxiety, confusion, and feeling different from others around them. Michelle reported about one interview, "the lady just looked at me like I was an alien or something when I told her I didn't have a driver's license or a car." Cults strip their members of their identities, leaving them incapacitated physically, emotionally, financially, and vocationally (Ford, 1993; Langone, 1993; Leisure Whitlatch, 2010). As members are prohibited from outside work, their vocational

identity may become eroded, particularly for women members (Wolfson, 2002). Michelle explained "from an early age I was told that I couldn't do anything by myself. That I had to depend on my husband for everything. And that my job was to please him." Paul also realized that he lacked a vocational identity, he stated when he got out he did not "have a trade." He indicated this was one big problem with being in a cult; members work for the group but exit the cult without being trained enough to have a profession. This aligns with Boeri's (2002) study which suggested that cult survivors are limited by their lack of education and work experience.

Theme Five: Inability to Maintain Employment

The fifth theme, Inability to Maintain Employment, corresponds with Strauser et al.'s, (2006) findings that trauma survivors demonstrated high levels of dysfunctional work personality behaviors. They describe work personality behaviors such as inappropriate interaction with co-workers and the public, on-task behavior, and timeliness. In this study, Jennifer explained she "never fit in with anyone. If I had to guess, I probably went through 40 jobs." Sam reported "being scared to death my first day. I didn't know what to expect at all. I didn't have any computer experience and I actually didn't do that great greeting people at first when they came in." Michelle reported her interactions with her coworkers at first were "just awful, I didn't fit in."

Individuals with higher levels of trauma symptoms may also have difficulty maintaining regular attendance on the job (Strauser et al., 2006). Participants in this study described the inability to get along with coworkers and supervisors as well as difficulty with attendance on the job. At times, Michelle had difficulty going to work. "Physically, no. Mentally, yeah it was tough. There were times that I almost missed being part of the group. At least there I fit in. Out

here I was an outsider." The majority of participants were able to maintain employment for only a few weeks or months before quitting or being fired. Half of the participants reported 40 or more jobs since leaving the cult. In 30 years, Paul "probably had 100-125 jobs, plus five businesses I started that failed, and tried about a dozen Multi-Level companies that I was unsuccessful in."

Theme Six: Talking It Out

The sixth theme, Talking It Out, demonstrated the need for participants to talk to someone in their lives whom they felt would not "judge" them. Many expressed difficulties with being able to open up to others, but also seemed to feel that opening up was important to integrate into "normal" life. This supports previous research findings that an individual's ability to cope with violence or trauma is moderated by individual and contextual factors, including social support, cognitive functioning, personality variables, behavioral capacities, preexisting psychological conditions, and the duration and intensity of the trauma (Coursol, Lewis & Garrity, 2001; Strauser et al., 2006).

Discussions from participants in this study corresponded with Goldberg (2006) and McCabe, Goldberg, Langone, & DeVoe's (2007) findings that former cult members tended to fear and distrust other people because of abuse experienced in the cult and the cult's view of outsiders as untrustworthy. Allison was taught to be "fearful of the outside world." Jennifer was "forbidden from reading outside books, watching movies, listening to music or talking to anyone outside of the group. Everything, including education was evil." However, Jennifer also discussed the need to "try and realize that there are people out there to help. And not everything is as evil as we were taught".

Theme Seven: Symptoms of Psychiatric Disabilities

The seventh theme, Symptoms of Psychiatric Disabilities, highlighted the need for individuals from an abusive cult to be able to get the help they need in order to be appropriately diagnosed and treated. Many researchers have asserted that cults are psychologically damaging and have negative effects on the individuals who participate (Barker, 2006; Burghoffer, 2002; Lalich & Tobias 2006; Singer 2003; Singer & Lalich, 1995; West & Martin, 1994). This is consistent with previous research finding that abuse, neglect, and other traumas affected brain development and increased a person's vulnerability to develop physical illnesses, mental illnesses, substance-related disorders, and impairment in other life areas (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). However, a fear of trusting others often keeps individuals from seeking treatment. For example, Paul reported fear of seeking treatment from a therapist because he was afraid of being judged by someone who did not have the experience of what it is like to be a member of a cult.

Jennifer "gave into the drugs" because she "liked being able to just be numb, to not have so many memories from our time" her drug use continued until she was hospitalized following a suicide attempt. Allison also "fell into a bad depression and began drinking heavily" and also attempted suicide leading to hospitalized. Even after participating in treatment, Jennifer has not been able to complete her education, stating that she "will start but then panic sets in and I freeze." Self-harm has been found to be used as an attempt to cope with distress that seems too overwhelming or to cope with a sense of being trapped, helpless, and "damaged" (Herman, 1997; Santa Mina & Gallop, 1998). In this study, two out of six of the participants admitted to self-injurious behaviors.

Research Questions

This study examined the following main research question: What is the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult? To gain a deeper understanding of the unique essence of the experience, four research sub-questions were also explored. These four sub-questions will be answered below.

Research Sub-question 1: Using Jahoda's (1981, 1982, 1997) theory of latent benefits of employment (time structure, activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status) what are the primary barriers for integration to employment after cult involvement?

As previously discussed, Marie Jahoda developed the latent deprivation model, which stated that paid work provides both a manifest function (income) and five latent functions, which are time structure, activity, status, collective purpose, and social contact (Jahoda, 1981; Jahoda, 1982; Jahoda, 1997). Jahoda contends that the loss of these latent functions during unemployment impacts negatively on psychological well-being because it deprives a person of the valued by-products of employment, which typically function as psychological supports. Therefore, when an individual is unemployed, they will suffer psychological distress. This study further supports Jahoda's model. Participants who were unemployed for longer periods of time or more frequently described higher amounts of psychological distress. It appears that the long lengths of unemployment experienced while in the cult led to a barrier for integration after cult involvement.

Research sub-question 2: Are there additional barriers to gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement due to the adverse psychosocial consequences of cult membership?

For participants in this study, there were additional barriers to gaining and maintaining employment after cult involvement. Barriers included a desire to hide past cult involvement from co-workers, family, and friends. The process of filling out job applications and other documents was a challenge for many participants. Participants also experienced deficits in training, work skills, and vocational identities.

Research sub-question 3: How can rehabilitation counselors and other professionals best assist an individual obtaining employment after leaving a cult?

Individuals with negative cult experiences may have the unique issue of acquiring a disability due to traumatic experiences, necessitating social supports and professional interventions to assist with their transition into society. However, like participants in this study, other individuals leaving a cult may not know about possible services or may be afraid to request help. Due to their lack of knowledge and reticence in requesting help, it is incumbent upon rehabilitation counselors to communicate information about available services to individuals leaving a cult. Rehabilitation counselors must be able to establish rapport and trust with individuals who may be distrustful of outside help.

Research sub-question 4: What benefits and resources are the most useful for individuals gaining or maintaining employment after cult involvement?

Most participants sought the help of past cult members when they were first leaving the cult. Participants in this study reported that talking to other individuals with similar experiences was the most beneficial thing they encountered during reintegration. While talking to other former cult members was the most beneficial, talking to anyone whom the individual trusted was also reported to beneficial. Participants reported opening up was important in establishing a "normal" life.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Rehabilitation counselors should be aware of the unique challenges experienced by these clients in order to provide appropriate assistance to individuals during this transition. Based upon the findings of this study, rehabilitation counselors working with individuals who have past cult experience can implement strategies to increase the probability of successful rehabilitation outcomes. In order to accomplish this, rehabilitation counselors should first be more educated about this population and their unique needs during their training programs. Information about cult survivors should be integrated into textbooks used in training programs for rehabilitation counselors. This important step will bring about an awareness, help begin discussions, and possibly spark an interest in further research about this population. Other important implications for rehabilitation counselors are further explored through the seven themes that were discovered in this study below.

Theme One: Hiding the Past

In this study, all participants described an effort to hide their past involvement with a cult in multiple aspects of their life. Participants expressed feelings of humiliation, shame, and constant worry about others finding out about their past cult involvement. In order to hide their past, individuals would outright lie, tell part of the truth, or avoid discussions. A rehabilitation counselor can be a useful tool for individuals to begin to trust others when discussing their past. As a means of encouragement, counselors can emphasize the client's strengths and survival skills. Acknowledging the difficulty that an individual has overcome by even seeking vocational rehabilitation is a necessary first step. Using strengths-based counseling is helpful in developing a trusting and safe environment. Accepting and validating clients' experiences in a non-judgmental way is paramount in building trust with a cult survivor. Getting the survivor to speak

about their past may be critical in helping them accept themselves and not be ashamed of who they are.

Because of a survivor's previous experience with domination and control, it is recommended that the counselor give the cult survivor control in regard to pace and direction of the counseling process. The individual needs to have the authority to decide which modality will be most helpful for self-expression. It is important for the counselor to ask the survivor how they express themselves most effectively. For example, if the survivor enjoys drawing or painting, the counselor can encourage them to make an artistic representation of something that symbolizes or portrays the strength and courage the individual has shown with leaving the cult and seeking vocational rehabilitation.

Theme Two: Fear

All participants in this study discussed the feelings of fear that were experienced at some point in the experience of obtaining employment after cult involvement. Fear is a common feeling expressed by cult survivors. Ex-members of abusive cults come from an environment in which they were not mentally or emotionally safe. The individual may have been broken down physically and mentally in order to become highly vulnerable to the suggestions and wishes of the group's leader. This type of control is what separates a cultic group from other religions and organizations.

A cult uses manipulative and unethical techniques to control their members in order to advance the goals of the group. This control strips the individual of free will and the ability to make everyday decisions. Individuals in this study had difficulty once they left the cult with knowing "where to live, what to wear or what to eat" because these decisions were not up to

them while they were in the cult. Another type of fear expressed in this study was the fear of "outsiders" or "authorities". Many reported fear about reaching out to professionals in order to receive assistance. Many spoke of the fear of "being judged" from family, friends and coworkers. Participants expressed feelings of fear and outwardly displayed this fear through actions like avoiding eye contact with the researcher.

Rehabilitation counselors need to allow the survivor to speak about their fears without trying to downplay the severity of these fears for the individual. These are true fears that the ex-cult member feels. Threats are a mainstay of abusive cults. Individuals have been trained to view anyone not in the cult as an outsider that is "evil" and cannot be trusted. These threats help cults keep individuals from leaving or telling about the abuse. Some individuals may have been severely punished for any attempt to communicate about the abuse or to reach out for any kind of help while they were in the cult. Building a trusting relationship with someone outside of their former cult may take years. Many participants in this study stated that they could not align or join other groups, even years after leaving the cult, due to fear and a lack of trust.

Theme Three: Application Difficulties

This study found that participants experienced difficulty with the application part of the job search. Participants lacked knowledge about how to fill out important documents, complete applications, and obtain documentation such as a driver's license or birth certificates. Individuals also expressed how a lack a work history added to the shame and stigma attached to the label of an ex-cultist. This shame and stigma becomes another barrier for ex-cult members when they reenter society. Rehabilitation counselors need to be aware of resources available to help this population gain the skills necessary to apply for a job. Rehabilitation counselors can

help these individuals with these difficulties in a number of ways. First, a functional assessment evaluating the client's performance in key functions such as: living, managing finances, learning, working, and interacting socially should be completed. Interventions can then be planned to help the individual develop the needed skills. Some individuals need training in basic life skills and basic skills needed to perform effectively in the workforce. Types of services for individuals may include: life skills training programs, job readiness and adult education.

Life skills training prepares individuals who have never lived independently to manage the requirements of daily life. This type of training program may involve a residential program or halfway house that offers opportunities to gain social and life skills (e.g. cooking, cleaning, money management, grocery shopping, and general household planning). Job readiness programs can be provided through job clubs, vocational rehabilitation agencies, nonprofit or community agencies, or federally funded job training programs. These programs assist individuals gain the specific skills and attitudes needed to obtain and maintain employment. For example, individuals in some job readiness programs learn how to interview for a job and make a positive impression on an employer, how to apply for a job in writing, how to dress, and how to prepare a résumé or work history.

Many ex-cult members can only meet employment goals through appropriate education or training. Some survivors lack literacy due to insufficient education in the cult. Others may have dropped out of school in order to join a cult. Adult education programs are available for free or at a low cost in virtually every part of the United States. These programs offer preparation for GED testing, remedial education programs, and basic courses for adults. Some community programs offer basic computer courses or other work-related skills training.

Rehabilitation counselors may also assist an individual with locating transportation and other necessary supports for an individual during a job search. The counselor needs to ensure that an individual can conduct a job search. Some cult survivors need help learning how to secure employment because they have never looked for a job. Counselors should teach an individual how to obtain job leads (networking with friends, checking job boards, and want ads), how to read and assess want ads (is a position is appropriate for the individual's skills, interests, and background?), and how to prepare a resume or job application that presents the individual in the best possible light (e.g. use of a functional resume rather than a chronological resume). Rehabilitation counselors can further assist individuals by developing a short introductory speech, role-playing its delivery, and learning what types of responses to expect from potential employers.

Theme Four: Difficulty Obtaining Employment

Participants in this study expressed difficulty with obtaining employment. Cult survivors experience difficultly entering society and the workplace because they lack the skills to be successful in work and in relationships. Participants in this study relayed that they lacked "a trade" or any real set of job skills. Most participants attempted to obtain jobs that were entry-level and did not require much education. Part of the difficulty with finding employment for participants was also due to the loss of self-identity and vocational identity.

Individuals with past cult experience may have a diminished ability to match their skills and abilities to appropriate work settings. Rehabilitation counselors can assist individuals in identifying their skills and abilities that will interact well within specific workplace needs through a comprehensive examination of the individual's past work and educational experience.

A thorough screening is intended to provide a picture of the individual's vocational history and potential. This type of screening should include a vocational and educational history, including looking at legal employment, other-than-legal employment, military history, and special skills. Many cult survivors lack a legal, easily verifiable employment history, but may have worked in jobs for the cult from which they have acquired functional work-related skills.

Rehabilitation counselors need to help individuals with rehabilitation efforts, such as returning to school or possible volunteer opportunities. Both of these options allow an individual to gain skills and have information to put into their applications and resumes. An option that can be used in conjunction to education is an apprenticeship program. An apprenticeship program offers a structured process for mastering a particular profession, such as plumbing or carpentry while working alongside a skilled person. These programs are organized through state programs, unions and employment commissions and can be a helpful method of skills acquisition.

Helping an individual obtain employment after cult involvement may require the rehabilitation counselor to provide multiple services, such as networking with employers, establishing relationships with them, and assembling information about employment opportunities for clients (all within the scope of confidentiality). Supported work programs should also be considered for individuals who are not yet able to maintain employment without constant intervention. Common forms of supported employment service delivery include: Job coaching, enclave or mobile crews, and mentoring.

Theme Five: Inability to Maintain Employment

This study found that if a former cult member obtained employment, a new set of employment barriers emerged. Participants in this study described dysfunctional work personality behaviors such as inappropriate interaction with co-workers and the public, an inability to work with superiors, problems with timeliness, on-task behaviors, and difficulty maintaining regular attendance on the job. Social situations, such as meetings, were a source of anxiety for some. The majority of participants were able to maintain employment for only a few weeks or months before quitting or being fired. Half of the participants reported having five or more jobs every year since leaving the cult. It appears that the majority of the time individuals failed to maintain employment because they had a poor understanding of workplace rules, norms, or behaviors.

Rehabilitation counselors can be imperative in helping former cult members obtain and maintain employment. Counselors should help the individual identify any reasonable accommodations or assistive device needed to perform required job functions. Resources outside of employment should also be located such as child care, transportation, and other needed supports to assist the individual with being able to continue employment. Former cult members may also need additional education to help them manage their paycheck and household budget or to address other life changes and responsibilities that occur as a result of employment. Most of the participants in this study reported that they were not allowed to keep money or make financial decisions during their time in the cult. Rehabilitation counselors may be able to locate free or low cost financial planning counseling. Long-term natural supports should also be implemented into a rehabilitation plan for individuals so they can avoid unnecessary stress, take advantage of opportunities to advance, and manages crises at work.

Theme Six: Talking It Out

All individuals in this study reported that talking to others is important. Most preferred to talk to individuals whom they felt would not "judge" them, preferably former cult members or others whom they trusted. Many expressed difficulties with being able to open up to others, but also reported that opening up was important in getting back into "normal" life. Traditional therapy may be helpful, but what may be more beneficial for past cult members is finding a peer who has had similar experiences. Most participants in this study were more comfortable confiding in someone with similar experiences. A rehabilitation counselor may be able to locate a peer support group or person for the individual to speak with to help the individual talk about their past in comfort. This would be similar to the use of sponsors in the Alcoholics Anonymous model.

Next, while it would be for a smaller population, rehabilitation counselors closest in proximity to the Wellspring Retreat in Ohio could offer their services in conjunction with the recovery program. As one of the few inpatient rehabilitation facilities for ex-members of abusive cults, this facility is able to reach more individuals seeking treatment than any other facility in the United States. Individuals going through inpatient rehabilitation to overcome their cultic abusive experiences need to have a vocational aspect as part of their recovery. If individuals are able to learn about available vocational resources while they are in inpatient rehabilitation, they may be more comfortable seeking this type of assistance when they are back at home after discharge.

Theme Seven: Symptoms of Psychiatric Disabilities

This study found that individuals from an abusive cult need to be able to get therapeutic help to be appropriately diagnosed and treated for symptoms of psychiatric disorders. However, a fear of trusting others, may keep these individuals from seeking treatment. Participants from this study reported fear of seeking treatment from a therapist because they were afraid of being judged by someone who did not have the experience of what it is like to be a member of a cult. In this study, participants described an array of symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Anxiety was one of the most commonly reported feelings. Anxiety was reported at all stages of a participant's lives from when they were in the cult, when they were leaving, looking for employment and even while trying to maintain employment. Two participants had issues with substance abuse and had suicidal attempts after leaving the cult.

With the unique issue of acquiring a disability due to traumatic experiences, individuals leaving a cult would be at a greater need of social supports and professional intervention to help transition back into society. Rehabilitation counselors have received specialized training and education related to psychosocial, medical, and vocational aspects of trauma that help to address the needs of cult survivors. When working with ex-members of a cult, rehabilitation counselors need to meet the client's needs in a safe, collaborative, and compassionate manner. Important considerations for rehabilitation counselors working with ex-members of cults include: preventing treatment practices that retraumatize trauma victims, building on the strengths and resources of clients in the context of their environments, and endorsing trauma-informed principles in agencies practices.

Limitations

A common limitation for qualitative research, as is with this study, is the limitation of its ability to be generalized (Morrisey & Higgs, 2006). Because of this, it is important to note that participants in this study may not necessarily be representative of the whole population of former cult members. Limitations of working with samples derived from individuals willing to write or speak publically about their experience also need to be considered. This sample may be skewed towards individuals who found the cultic experience harmful, while those who did not have the same harmful experience would not be driven to discuss it (Langone 1993; McKibben, 2000). Individuals may also not publically speak about or write about their past experiences due to reasons such as fear, lack of knowledge about resources, or other underlying reasons. Modified snowball sampling was used, in the hope of attracting some of these individuals who have not been publically open about their past association with a cult.

Furthermore, it is noted that there are problems with relying on the retrospective accounts of past cult members, as they are interpretive and influenced by the individuals' present situation. Even with these reservations, very few qualitative studies of former cult members have been published. More qualitative studies are necessary to explore the individual's account of their experiences with past cult involvement and the impact these experiences have had on employment.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although trauma has been studied in general, very little literature exists about the impact of cult involvement and employment. The findings of this study are an important first step in filling this gap. This phenomenological study offers a preliminary view surrounding the essence of past cult members experience obtaining employment. However, this study's findings compel

further investigation into the relationship and connectivity between cult involvement and future employment. Additional focus, differing methodologies, and expanded samples are considerations for researchers as they continue investigating this phenomenon and work to further seek understanding and define gaps in scholarly literature. This research offers only a starting point that now encourages further exploration.

Conclusions

This phenomenological study presents a portrait of the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult. Their stories develop a foundation of knowledge surrounding how cult involvement impacts future employment. This study examined the following main research question: What is the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult? The investigation utilized phenomenological methodology to form descriptive themes. The findings revealed seven themes: hiding the past, fear, application difficulties, difficulty obtaining employment, inability to maintain employment, talking it out, and symptoms of psychiatric disabilities. These themes are critical to clients who are participating in vocational rehabilitation services following cult involvements. This study provides a deep insight into how individuals perceive the experience of obtaining employment after cult involvement. The purposeful design focuses on the voice of individuals. The involved ex cult members who were interviewed each shared valuable perspectives into the phenomenon. Their stories demonstrate that barriers to employment do exist for this population. This study is a first step to better understand the connectivity between cult involvement and employability.

Rehabilitation counselors must address the psychosocial, medical, and vocational aspects of an individual's life in order to help them have a successful rehabilitation plan and future

employment after cult involvement. Special considerations should be made while working with ex-cult members to address the underlying effects of the trauma, including underlying psychological and behavioral problems resulting from the trauma. Rehabilitation counselors should be aware of the way the client's past experience with a cult affects the way they experience everyday life. The counselor can ensure a better rehabilitation experience with the practice of exploring the lingering effects of trauma and through exploring methods to make necessary accommodations. Taking special considerations when providing rehabilitation services to victims of trauma can lead to more successful employment. Other predictors of employment include the person's interest and motivation about employment, as well as the quality, continuity, and intensity of treatment services provided (Waghorn et al., 2012).

Successful employment is valuable to individuals who have left a cult. In addition to the monetary rewards of employment, work can increase self-esteem, which can be an especially strong therapeutic tool for those with psychiatric disabilities as it provides a means of structuring and occupying time, opportunities for social interaction and a sense of personal achievement (Tschopp, Bishop, & Mulvihill, 2001; Waghorn et al., 2012). Many individuals with psychiatric disabilities cite employment as critical in their recovery process (Waghorn, et al., 2012). Bond et al., (2001) found that individuals with psychiatric disabilities who worked in competitive employment showed a reduction in psychiatric symptoms, an increase in self-esteem, and satisfaction in leisure and finances. To ensure successful employment, it is important that rehabilitation counselors use their vast array of skills. With their experience of working with employers, rehabilitation counselors are in a great position to help both the employee and employer to understand the laws and accommodations that are necessary to helping facilitate

employment for individuals with disabilities. Utilizing all of these skills will maximize the former cult member's chances for finding successful employment.

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Appendix A
Vocational Implications of Cult Involvement
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Principal Researcher: Melissa Wilkins
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brent Williams

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
You are invited to participate in a research study about vocational implications of cult involvement. You are being asked to participate in this study because you may have a unique experience involving this phenomenon.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?
Melissa Wilkins,
220 Graduate Education Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Who is the Faculty Advisor?
Brent Williams, PhD
154 Graduate Education Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the unique essence of the experience for individuals obtaining employment after leaving a cult.

Who will participate in this study?
This qualitative study will be conducted in the tradition of phenomenology, exploring the lived experiences of 7 adults who have been out of a cult for at least 12 months.

What am I being asked to do?
Your participation will require the following:
Three interviews will be conducted over Skype or in person. Each interview should take between 30 minutes and one hour. Following the interviews, you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about this project.
What are the possible risks or discomforts?
There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
A benefit of participating in this project is gaining the opportunity to express your feelings and help guide future research that could be useful for other individuals with past experiences with cults.

How long will the study last?
Three interviews, each lasting between 30 minutes and one hour, will be conducted over a five month period.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?
No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No, there will be no cost associated with participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
As a participant in this project, you are free to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the research activity and the methods being used.
How will my confidentiality be protected?
All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Discussions will be digitally recorded to help accurately capture your insights in your own words. If you feel uncomfortable with it being recorded, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. The digital recording will be stored in a locked office until I have been able to gather important information from them. As soon as this is complete, the recording will be deleted. Identifying information will not be included in the study. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

Will I know the results of the study?
At the conclusion of the study, you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Brent Williams or Principal Researcher, Melissa Wilkins. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Melissa Wilkins,
220 Graduate Education Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Phone: 501-366-9474
Email: meljones@uark.edu.

Brent Williams, PhD
154 Graduate Education Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Phone: 479-575-8696
FAX: 479-575-3319
btwilli@uark.edu

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
210 Administration
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting the participant sign it.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What is your experience with seeking employment after leaving the cult?
2. Did you experience any barriers in gaining or maintaining employment? If so, what?
3. How did you support yourself while looking for work?
4. Did you have transportation and a driver's license when you began your job search?
5. What resources did you use (unemployment office, internet, in person contacts, networking --if so, did you use cult contacts?)
6. Were you aware of resources like state vocational rehabilitation programs?
7. Did you feel like your cult education was sufficient?
8. Did you consider going to school instead of going to work? If so, what did you do?
9. How many interviews did you have prior to getting a job?
10. Did you feel prepared to interview?
11. How did you handle interview questions about past work?
12. Did you have necessary paperwork to complete employment forms?
13. Were you ever turned down for a job? If so, what was your perception of why?
14. How many jobs have you had since you left the cult?
15. How long did you have these jobs?
16. How were your interactions with your coworkers?
17. Did you ever have any problems with going to work?
18. Have you experienced any depression or anxiety related to finding employment?
19. In your opinion, how can rehabilitation counselors and other professionals best assist an individual with obtaining employment after leaving a cult?
20. What advice would you have to others trying to gain employment after leaving a cult?

Appendix C
IRB Approval Letter

October 5, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Melissa Wilkins Brent Williams
FROM:	Ro Windwalker IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	15-08-044
Protocol Title:	*Vocational Implications of Cult Involvement*
Review Type:	☐ EXEMPT ☒ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB
Approved Project Period:	Start Date: 09/29/2015 Expiration Date: 09/28/2016

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 7 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.